

TEAMS OF OUR LADY – CANADA

NATIONAL GATHERING 2026

“RETURNING TO THE SOURCE”

PRESENTATION: WELCOME ADDRESS

SPEAKER(S): BISHOP CHRISTIAN RODEMBOURG

DATE / SESSION: FRIDAY, AUGUST 21 – 5:30–5:50 PM

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: FRENCH

Dear Couples and Spiritual Advisors of the Teams of Our Lady,

It is a great joy for me to extend a warm welcome to you as we gather for this National Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady at Saint Joseph's Oratory.

Having come from every corner of Canada, welcome to each and every one of you! The chosen theme, **"Return to the Source,"** gives me the pleasure of sharing with you some personal memories of my encounter with Father Henri Caffarel, along with a few reflections on the history of our Movement, within which I have been involved for many years as a Spiritual Counsellor.

From July 4 to 10, 1981, at the age of twenty-two, I participated in a retreat on interior prayer (*oraison*) at the House of Prayer in Troussures, a small village in northern France. It was a profound spiritual experience that allowed me to discover a bold and prophetic witness to Christ.

Though small in stature, Father Caffarel spoke with authority and conviction. He struck me as a demanding man, yet one deeply rooted in faith. His words were precise and thoughtful, and he radiated a profound love for the Church that touched me deeply. Steeped in monastic spirituality, his conferences and homilies challenged us and invited us to a deeper commitment to Christ.

The Depth of His Gaze

One memory from that retreat remains particularly vivid. I was struck and deeply moved by Father Caffarel's gaze, which seemed at once fixed upon Christ and fully attentive to each retreatant. One sensed in him a desire to communicate not his own wisdom, but the wisdom of a God of love and tenderness who nourished his entire being.

How can we fail to see a connection with the Gospel accounts that speak of Christ's gaze—when He encounters Zacchaeus, when He calls His disciples, or when a man asks Him the way to the Kingdom? Scripture tells us: *Jesus looked at him and loved him.*

For Father Caffarel, *love and vision were inseparable. We must learn to look to love, but we must also love to truly see. A loving gaze awakens love.*

With conviction, he shared his experience of life and faith—an experience reflected not only in his teaching but also in his way of praying and relating to others.

For him, prayer meant becoming aware of God's loving gaze upon us—a gaze that sanctifies and transforms. To pray is to open ourselves in faith to God's creative and renewing action in our daily lives.

God looks upon you and loves you. God looks upon me and loves me. His is a gaze of wonder, a gaze essential to our lives. God Himself is its source.

“The” Defining Encounter

What particularly captured my attention in the life of Henri Caffarel was his decisive personal encounter with Christ in March 1923. He spoke of it in an interview published in *Panorama* magazine in July 1978:

"At the age of twenty, Jesus Christ suddenly became Someone for me. Nothing spectacular happened. But on that distant day in March, I knew that I was loved and that I loved; and that from then on, it would be for life between Him and me. Everything was decided."

In Jean Allemand's book *A Man Seized by God*, we find this confidante reflection from Father Caffarel:

"Since that day, I have had only one desire: to enter ever more deeply into intimacy with Christ myself, and to lead others into that same intimacy."

Patient and discreet, intellectually brilliant and deeply passionate about literature, Henri Caffarel was a spiritual father attentive to his brothers and sisters in humanity. God, who is love and tenderness, was the foundation of his entire life. He was a man profoundly shaped by the God of encounter.

In *Marriage: An Adventure in Holiness*, he emphasized that an encounter with God is always personal—a decisive face-to-face meeting. God loves each of His children with a unique and incomparable love.

For Father Caffarel, mental prayer was the meeting and exchange of love between God and the human person—a relationship lived together. In *Presence to God: One Hundred Letters on Prayer*, he writes from the very first pages that true presence to God is realized above all in prayer—the prayer that is first and foremost adoration and self-offering.

That is why he insisted that helping Christians learn to pray has never been more urgent than in a time when they are becoming increasingly aware of their apostolic mission and their responsibilities in the world. The Holy Spirit, he said, remains the only true master of prayer.

Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits, O.P., the postulator of Father Caffarel's cause for canonization, observed:

"When he spoke or wrote, he stood before God; one had the impression that he was praying. Consequently, everything he said was concrete, simple, and direct."

The Influence of Literature

During that retreat, I was also deeply impressed by Father Caffarel's love of literature and his ability to draw nourishment from it. He generously shared this richness with others to help cultivate their inner life.

Indeed, our Christian life is nourished not only through devotion, and married life is far more than a simple face-to-face relationship. Our faith, our prayer, and our commitment to service are strengthened by thoughtful reflection and serious reading.

Father Caffarel's library included authors such as Daniélou, Urs von Balthasar, Maritain, Péguy, Claudel, and Mauriac. Through these and many other writers, he sought to deepen the spiritual life of couples and help them appreciate the mysteries of the human heart.

Throughout his life he founded or inspired several important publications, including *L'Anneau d'Or* (The Golden Ring), devoted to marriage and family spirituality (1945); the Feu Nouveau publishing house (1945); the monthly Teams of Our Lady newsletter (1949); the *Cahiers sur l'Oraison* (1957); and, beginning in 1970, a correspondence course on prayer that continued for eighteen years.

Deepening the Christian Meaning of Marriage

Following a retreat, he preached in 1938 and encouraged by two women who had participated in it, Henri Caffarel met with four married couples on the evening of February 25, 1939. They wished to deepen both the Christian and human dimensions of their marriage and family life.

In the Catholic Church, marriage is far more than a social contract or a promise of affection. It is a radical call to holiness and a living sign of Christ's love.

Through the sacrament of Matrimony, spouses receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to love one another as Christ loves the Church. What they receive is not merely human strength, but divine strength.

Every home is called to become a domestic church—the first place where faith is transmitted, prayer is nurtured, and charity is lived.

Each couple is entrusted with the mission of bearing witness to fidelity and joy in love, especially in a world where relationships are often fragile and under pressure. Your married love becomes a sacramental sign of God's love for the entire human family.

Holiness is not achieved in spite of marriage, but through it. Every aspect of daily life—raising children, work, sacrifice, mutual forgiveness—becomes an opportunity to grow more deeply rooted in God, who is love and tenderness.

Father Caffarel responded to the couples' request with a simple invitation:

"Let us seek together."

Those first couples later chose the name *Our Lady of All Joys*.

I can personally attest to how deeply those words—*Let us seek together*—have shaped my priestly and episcopal ministry for more than thirty years and continue to do so today.

In August 1943, a retreat preached to widows in Lourdes became the seed from which the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Resurrection and the spiritual movement of *Hope and Life* would emerge.

Throughout all these initiatives, care for married couples and concern for their human and spiritual growth remained the common thread.

Disciple-Missionaries of Christ

In the preamble to the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady (1947), Henri Caffarel invited every couple and every team member to become seekers of God and disciple-missionaries of Christ in their own time:

"They seek competence in their profession; they desire to make all their activities a collaboration in God's work and a service to others."

Alongside prayer, Father Caffarel emphasized the importance of mutual support and witness.

Prayer enables us to discover God's plan for marriage, love, sexuality, motherhood, fatherhood, and education.

Mutual support helps us come to know God more deeply and better understand the path that leads to Love itself and to union with Him.

Witness allows us to share what we live as individuals and as couples, bearing fruit in the midst of the realities and challenges of the world around us.

His guiding principle was simple:

"To give yourselves to one another as husband and wife, so that together you may give yourselves to others."

The Endaveor

As early as 1959, Father Caffarel expressed concern about the weakening of spiritual life among team members. This led him to place particular emphasis on what we now call the **endaveors**.

These practical commitments help couples deepen their married life by becoming more firmly rooted in the Gospel and progressing on the path of holiness:

- **The Sit-Down:** A monthly dialogue between spouses before God to reflect honestly on their life together.
- **Personal Prayer (Mental Prayer):** A daily period of silent prayer.
- **Couple and Family Prayer:** Placing God—who is love and tenderness—at the heart of the home.
- **Listening to the Word of God:** Daily reading of Sacred Scripture.
- **The Rule of Life:** A personal commitment to ongoing human and spiritual growth.

- **The Annual Retreat:** A time of renewal and spiritual refreshment.

These practices should never be lived as mere obligations or external observances. Rather, they are fundamental means of growth for our couples, for each of us, and for our Spiritual Advisors as well.

Speaking in Brazil in 1962, Father Caffarel stated that the only truly valid reason for joining a team is the desire to know God better, love Him more deeply, and serve Him more faithfully. Other motivations may be good, but they are not enough. The Teams of Our Lady must be composed of Christians with a rich and vibrant interior life.

Again, in Brazil, in 1972, he warned that a movement—or a Church—that ceases to reflect on the ongoing renewal of its mission inevitably enters decline and will soon face crisis. We are called, he said, to be a leaven of renewal, perhaps even of spiritual revolution.

Seventy Years in Canada: A Spirit of Service

"Responsibility" and "collegiality" have long been hallmarks of the Teams of Our Lady throughout the world. They are gifts entrusted to the Movement for the service of couples and teams and for the building up of ecclesial communion.

For seventy years in Canada, couples have generously assumed positions of responsibility in a spirit of service. Supported by other couples and by their Spiritual Advisors, they act as watchmen and stewards, helping to preserve and transmit the rich spiritual heritage received from the founding couples and from Henri Caffarel.

I recall Pope Francis' address to the Teams of Our Lady in Rome in September 2015. He observed that faithful participation in team life enriches each member through formation, sharing, friendship, and mutual encouragement.

He also highlighted the reciprocal fruitfulness of the relationship between couples and their accompanying priests, thanking Team members for the support and encouragement they offer to priests who find among your teams and families joy in their ministry, fraternal friendship, emotional balance, and spiritual fatherhood.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Dear friends, dear couples and Spiritual Advisors,

The retreat I experienced with Father Caffarel, his teaching, and the witness of his life continue to shape my ministry to this day. For thirty-one years as a priest and nine years as a bishop, they have inspired my service to couples and families.

As you and I can both see, today's world places tremendous demands on family life and can easily lead couples into isolation. The Teams of Our Lady offer a spiritual path and a supportive community that help us persevere along the way.

One of our greatest strengths is our team life. Through the fraternity and mutual support, we experience in our monthly meetings and times of renewal, we share both our joys and our struggles, our hopes and our challenges, helping one another to discern God's presence in our lives.

Let us thank the Lord for the gift of our Spiritual Advisors, whose presence symbolizes the close bond between the Sacrament of Matrimony and the Sacrament of Holy Orders, enriching both vocations.

Let us also bless the Lord for the theological and spiritual resources that continue to deepen our understanding of marriage, family life, and Christian discipleship.

Together, let us give thanks to God for our venerable brother Henri Caffarel, a true disciple-missionary of Christ.

I wish you a joyful and grace-filled National Gathering as we seek to **Return to the Source** through prayer, reflection, and fraternity.

May peace and joy be with you all. Let us remain united in the boundless tenderness of God.

In closing, I would like to share these words of Henri Caffarel, which continue to inspire my prayer:

O You who dwell at home in the depths of my heart: teach me to seek You and to find You there. I belong to You in the depths of my heart. In the depths of my heart, I am in communion with You.