

TEAMS OF OUR LADY – CANADA

NATIONAL GATHERING 2026

“RETURNING TO THE SOURCE”

PRESENTATION: CONFERENCE #1: RETURNING TO THE SOURCE

SPEAKER(S): MSGR. MAKARIOS WEHBI

DATE / SESSION: FRIDAY, AUGUST 21 – 7:30–8:00 PM

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: FRENCH

INTRODUCTION: The Jubilee of the Sap

Dear brothers and sisters, dear team couples, and dear spiritual advisors,

What a profound joy it is to gather here in Montreal to celebrate an abundance of graces that has flourished for seventy years! In 1956, the very first Teams of Our Lady took root on Canadian soil. Seventy years later, the tree has grown, braved winters, borne rich fruit, and we stand here today to look toward the future with a renewed sense of hope.

Yet, for a movement rooted in conjugal spirituality, celebrating an anniversary is never just about flipping through a scrapbook of memories or applauding a legacy that has passed. It means doing exactly what Christ asks of us today: **"Returning to the source."**

And what is this source? It is not an abstract concept, an administrative structure, or a mere methodology. The Source is a Person. It is Jesus Christ who speaks directly to us at the heart of the Gospel of Saint John:

"Abide in me, as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (Jn 15:4)

Father Henri Caffarel, our founder, whose theological insights continue to light our path, possessed an acute awareness of this absolute need to remain rooted. Let us listen to what he wrote to couples, warning them against an empty, superficial busyness:

"Christian activity must not be a form of agitation, but rather the overflowing of an intense interior life. [...] It is not doing that matters first, but being. And our Christian being is nourished at the Source, which is Christ." (Henri Caffarel, Editorial of the *Letter to the Teams of Our Lady*, "¹

Today, in 2026, in a complex and secularized world where marriage is so frequently fractured, how can we, as Christian couples, live and grow in our faith? How can we ensure that our marriage truly becomes a pathway to holiness, rather than a mere Christian cohabitation?

During our hour together, I propose a three-step journey guided by the hand of Father Caffarel and the Magisterium of the Church:

1. **The Divine Indwelling:** Understanding what it means that "God dwells in us and we dwell in Him" at the very heart of the couple.
2. **Marriage, the Sacrament of the Sap:** Rediscovering Father Caffarel's theology on conjugal holiness.
3. **The Concrete Endeavours:** The channels through which the evangelical sap circulates in our daily lives to keep us rooted.

PART I: The Divine Indwelling – The Mystery of the Couple-Temple

To understand Jesus' words, *"I abide in them and they abide in me,"* we must completely invert our usual perspective. We often view faith as an uphill, vertical struggle toward a distant God. Father Caffarel, drawing from the great mystical tradition of the Church, reminds us that God has made His home inside our homes.

Father Caffarel proclaimed this invisible truth with bold conviction:

*"The great secret of Christian marriage is not that the man and the woman love each other, but that Christ dwells within their love. [...] The Christian home is the place of the Trinitarian indwelling in the midst of the world."*²

This is the mystery of the Trinitarian indwelling transported into the heart of the family community. The Church, through the Second Vatican Council and the exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, officially enshrined

¹ Action and Contemplation," May 1952; reprinted in *Propos sur l'amour et le mariage*, Éditions du Feu Nouveau, Paris, p. 42.

² Henri Caffarel, *L'Anneau d'Or*, Special Issue 100: "The Home, Temple of God," July-August 1961, p. 284.

this insight by using the term "the Domestic Church." The home is not simply a location where Christians happen to reside; it is the place where Christ lives.

Father Caffarel challenged couples to recognize this divine grafting into their very flesh:

*"Christ is not external to the love of the spouses; through the sacrament, He penetrates this love, seizes it, and inhabits it as His very own dwelling place."*³

Dear teammates, take a moment to absorb the scale of this reality. When daily routines weigh heavily, when exhaustion sets in, and when the winters of life test your relationship, "abiding in Him" means remembering that we do not rely on our own depletable reservoirs, but on the infinite wellspring of divine grace.

Father Caffarel loved to use a classic, profound analogy to explain this: the image of a sponge. If you place a sponge in the ocean, the sponge is in the ocean, but the ocean is also inside the sponge. This is the mystery of those who abide in Jesus. They are immersed in His love, and His love completely saturates them.

For a couple in the Teams of Our Lady, abiding in Jesus means refusing to split life into two separate compartments: on one side, the spiritual life (Sunday Mass, a quick prayer), and on the other, the secular life (work, children, finances, intimacy). Everything is bound together. If Christ dwells in us, then our kitchen table is just as sacred as the church altar, because it is there that concrete charity is lived out.

This is precisely what the Church teaches when it reminds us that marriage is a permanent sacrament. It did not end on the day you signed the parish register. It is an active, current source—a sap that never stops flowing. Every single morning, Christ stands at the center of our home, inviting us to draw from His very life.

PART II: Marriage as a Pathway to Holiness – The Revolution of Conjugal Spirituality

For centuries, common perception dictated that to become a saint, one had to withdraw from the world, enter a monastery, or embrace Holy Orders. Marriage was sometimes viewed merely as a concession to human weakness or an institution for procréation. Father Caffarel's prophetic intuition, anticipating the Second Vatican Council by several decades, was to declare loudly and clearly: **marriage is a conductor of holiness.**

Let us listen to the words of the foundational Charter of 1947, which revolutionized family ministry:

³ Henri Caffarel, *Aux carrefours de l'amour*, Éditions du Feu Nouveau, 1954, Chapter II: "The Sacrament of Love," p. 73.

*"There are not two categories of Christians, those who are called to perfection and laity who are not. Marriage is a path to holiness that is full and complete. [...] The raw material of your holiness is your daily life, your human love sanctified by grace."*⁴ (Henri Caffarel, *Foundational Charter of the Teams of Our Lady*, 1947, Philosophical and Theological Preamble, p. 3).

This path to holiness does not mean being perfect couples who never argue, never struggle, or never hurt. Being a holy couple means being a couple that allows itself to be healed and transformed by grace. Christ did not come to destroy human love; He came to baptize it. He takes our love exactly as it is, with its passions and its limits, and injects His own love into it—*Agape*—the love that forgives, the love that gives without expecting anything in return.

However, this path demands a radical conversion. We cannot abide in Christ without accepting the pruning work of the Vinedresser. For a couple to grow, they must accept dying to their own selfishness. This is the very core of the spirituality of the Cross as lived out within marriage.

Father Caffarel formulated this with uncompromised clarity:

*"The danger that threatens a couple is not so much hatred as it is selfishness shared by two: this jealous withdrawal into private happiness that closes the doors of the home to the calls of the Church and the world. A Christian couple must be open, or they cease to be Christian."*⁵

This conjugal holiness carries an essential ecclesial dimension. A couple rooted in the Gospel becomes a lighthouse. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, echoes this exact thought by stating that the couple is a "living sign" of Christ's love for the Church. Today's world does not need grand, abstract lectures about God. It needs to see real, flesh-and-blood faces loving each other with a true, faithful, and forgiving love. A holy Christian couple is the most powerful sermon that can be preached to the people of our time.

PART III: The Concrete Endeavours – Channels of the Evangelical Sap

We now arrive at the practical core of our theme, our "return to the source." How do we practically ensure that we remain attached to the Vine? How does the sap travel from the root into the branches that we are?

Father Caffarel, a deeply realistic man, knew that good intentions are never enough. This is why he structured the Teams of Our Lady around the **Concrete Points of Effort** (The Endeavours). He did not view them as a rigid legal code or a list of chores, but as a discipline of love—means of spiritual growth.

⁴ Henri Caffarel, *Foundational Charter of the Teams of Our Lady*, 1947, Philosophical and Theological Preamble, p. 3.

⁵ Henri Caffarel, *Propos sur l'amour et le mariage*, Éditions du Feu Nouveau, 1956, p. 118

Let us listen to his explanation during the historic gathering at Chantilly:

*"The disciplines we propose to you are not arbitrary laws, but means of aspiration. They are like the necessary stakes [tutors] that allow a young plant to grow straight and not bend under the winds of custom and the age."*⁶

Let us re-examine these points through the lens of our theme: "Abiding in Him."

1. Listening to the Word of God and Daily Personal Prayer (Oraison)

To live inside someone, you must listen to their voice and remain in their presence. Mental prayer (*oraison*) is the precise moment when the branch drinks directly from the source in absolute silence. Father Caffarel is the great doctor of mental prayer for the laity. Drawing upon the definition of Saint Teresa of Avila, he wrote:

*"Mental prayer is nothing other than an intimate share between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. [...] For the lay person caught up in the duties of the world, it is the indispensable anchor."*⁷

2. Conjugal Prayer

This is the voice of the Domestic Church rising toward the Father. Praying as a couple is not merely juxtaposing two individual prayers. It is a unique prayer—the prayer of "one flesh" turning toward its Creator. When a husband and wife pray together, Christ is faithfully present in their midst, irrigating their human love with His own divine charity.

3. The Monthly Sit-Down (*Devoir de S'asseoir*)

This is the moment of necessary pruning, ensuring the branch can bear even more fruit. It is the art of dialogue in the presence of God.

*"The Monthly Sit-Down is that necessary pause, taken periodically under the gaze of God, where spouses strive to find the truth within themselves and within their couple. It is not a human tribunal; it is a joint exposure to the light of Christ."*⁸

4. The Rule of Life and the Annual Retreat

⁶ Henri Caffarel, *Introductory Report on the Concrete Points of Effort*, Chantilly Gathering, 1954; reprinted in *Cahiers des Équipes Notre-Dame*, no. 4, p. 12.

⁷ Henri Caffarel, *L'Oraison : Jalons sur la route*, Éditions du Feu Nouveau, 1958, Chapter I: "What is mental prayer?", p. 19.

⁸ Henri Caffarel, *L'Anneau d'Or*, no. 53, "The Monthly Sit-Down: The Art of Dialogue in God," 1953, p. 14.

In a world defined by distraction and constant multi-tasking, the rule of life and the annual retreat keep us anchored to what truly matters. They pull us away from the whirlwind of our daily obligations and place us squarely back in front of the Source, repairing what has been bruised and reigniting the flame of our early days.

CONCLUSION: Forward into the Next 70 Years!

Dear friends, my brothers and sisters in the Teams of Our Lady,

As we conclude this reflection, while the bells of this 70th anniversary echo here in Montreal and across all of Canada, Father Caffarel speaks to each of our couples with immense tenderness and a holy urgency. He reminds us that the adventure of conjugal holiness is only just beginning.

Let us never allow routine to extinguish our charism. Let us never let discouragement convince us that the model of Christian marriage is outdated or impossible. The more the world drifts from the anchors of faith, the more it desperately needs rooted couples—couples whose sap is pure, couples who overflow with the joy of the Gospel.

Go forward with confidence! Your love is great, your vocation is holy. Do not fear the demands of the Gospel, for Christ never asks for anything without providing the strength to accomplish it. Be living branches, heavy with fruit. Abide in Him, dwell in Him, and may your homes be the wellsprings where tomorrow's world will come to draw its hope.

Holy Mary, Our Lady, you who were the very first to offer your dwelling place so that the Word could inhabit it, sustain the Teams of Our Lady in Canada. Guide us always back to the Source.

Amen. Happy Jubilee to you all!