



My very dear Couples,

One of the topics under consideration in our Movement concerns the place of Spiritual Counsellors within the Teams of Our Lady. This reflection became necessary because of the shortage of priests who are able to render this service and which is more noticeable in some Regions and Super-Regions. It is a pertinent topic since the charismatic intuition of our Movement makes the relationship between the two sacraments, Holy Orders and Marriage, one of the most original principles in contemporary Christian spirituality. In order to help you in the discernment to be made should the lack of priests become more pronounced, today I wish to bring to your attention the richness that this spiritual relationship of the two sacraments represent in the mystique of our Movement. This is a reality as much for the couples as it is for the Spiritual Counsellors.

What do couples bring to Spiritual Counsellors? The most beautiful gift that couples can give to the Spiritual Counsellor is the possibility of sharing in a climate of prayer and spiritual friendship the practical life of couples and their families, which contributes to the embodiment and humanisation of the priestly ministry.

The fruitfulness of married love manifested by children and by the couple's and family's apostolic commitment helps the Spiritual Counsellor to understand that his celibacy must also be fruitful, in the joy and enthusiasm of his priestly consecration. Couples, on the other hand, learn with their Spiritual Counsellor that conjugal fruitfulness must be chaste. Moreover, couples receive from their Spiritual Counsellor the full richness of the priestly ministry in which he represents Jesus Christ in his spousal relationship with the Church: Christ and the Church, the husband and wife, that is the mystery that becomes an effective presence in the Team. The Team is built on the basis of these two sacraments, that highlight the same mystery, that is, the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church. In sacramental marriage, the husband represents Christ and the spouse represents the Church. But there is something more, even more profound: the Eucharistic relationship that unites the two sacraments. When the priest says at the consecration, *"This is my body which will be given up for you... This is the cup of my blood,"* he takes on these words in such a way that he himself becomes *the body given up, the cup of the blood* for the Church, for others, for the team. But, on the other hand, when couples, during the celebration of their marriage, exchange their vows, through which they accept each other and promise to be faithful to each other for the rest of their lives, they pronounce words that are similar to the Eucharistic formula: For you, I am a body given up, a cup of blood; I no longer belong to myself, but to you and forever, in a love that is stronger than death. The Eucharistic mystery illuminates the Sacrament of Holy Orders as much as it does the Sacrament of Marriage; both become a living and effective expression of

the complete, exclusive and total love of the spouses for each other and of the priests towards others.

There you have it, my dear couples, the deep and harmonious relationship that these very great sacraments share: Eucharist, Holy Orders and Marriage. But the secret and strength to live out this ideal of holiness are given to us through different means, that is through the sacrament of reconciliation and an intense life of personal and couple prayer.

That is the great mystery that we celebrate and experience in the relationship of the two sacraments within our teams. That is the spiritual heritage that we keep alive in the charism and spirituality of our Movement. The Spiritual Counsellor's presence in the team and the Movement cannot be trivialised, even with the shortage of priests in certain regions. We ought not to lose the richness that divine Providence bestowed upon the Church. Previously, people wanted to experience holiness as a couple united by the sacrament of marriage. Today, many people do not believe in marriage, and even less in the sacrament. And this is why the charism and mission of the Teams of Our Lady in the Church and the world are as topical as ever today. Let us live up to the demands of today's society. I invite you to reflect upon this topic during your Sit-Down and also to make it the subject of our conjugal prayer.

I give you my blessing and carry you all in my priestly heart.

**P. José Jacinto Ferreira de Farias, scj**