

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « Saint Louis and Marriage »

In April, we present a sixth theme on Saint Louis of France. We will reflect on how he lived his role as spouse, father and king of France. As Secular Franciscans, we also read article 17 of our Rule to better understand the impact in our lives today.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, the fraternity should have in place at the disposal of the members a Bible, at least one copy of the General Constitutions, an example of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and at least one copy of Living with Christ. Also, each member should have in hand their own copy of the Rule.

APRIL 2015 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening Prayer and Song: (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

« *GOD, France and Marguerite* » (*Motto engraved on Saint Louis' wedding ring*).

« *If sometimes I spend a lot of money, I would better like to do this with alms for the love of God than for frivolity or fashionable items* » (Saint Louis to his wife Marguerite).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: «MARRIED LIFE LIVED WITH FAITH »

It is the spouses who themselves administer the sacrament of marriage with their mutual consent.

At the time of Saint Louis, the men, and especially the women, married much younger than today. The marriage was usually the result of an arrangement between the families of the future couple.

Louis was twenty years old and Marguerite de Provence thirteen years old when they married. They had never met before but they quickly became in love with one another. They would wait six years for the birth of the first of their eleven children and will know the pain of losing many of them. Louis dearly loved Blanche de Castille, his mother, and was torn between his affection for her and his love for Marguerite; in respect for his mother, he finally chose his wife.

Louis shared his public life with his wife. He brought her along with him during his first departure for the Crusades, which was an absolute novelty. Marguerite, without completely understanding, accepted the religious fervour of her husband, which became more and more marked and demanding with the passing of time. Louis became aware that he was asking a lot of his wife and he showed great concern to ensure her future.

Sharing: while reading the previous paragraph, do you notice something particular in the relationship between Saint Louis and his wife, Marguerite. (About 10-15 minutes)

Continue the reading with another person.

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE: « CHOOSING ONE'S SELF, CHOOSING ONE'S SELF AGAIN »

Louis IX and Marguerite de Provence had not chosen each other but they welcomed each other with confidence and loved each other. In love, there is always a part to decide; it is because Louis and Marguerite decided to love each other that they are models for us. They send us back to the question: « And do I, each day, decide to say “yes” to my wife or husband? »

In a couple, the two persons evolve with the passing of time and the marriage requires that each accept the other not only as he or she is, but also as he or she becomes. As we advance more and more in time, we discover that our wife or husband is different. Since couples have chosen to advance together, that compels each one to make some adjustments, some conversions.

Saint Louis was a very pious man. Prayer is an essential element in the life of a Christian couple, because it puts God at the heart of their love and their married life. Personal prayer and spousal prayer complete one another, the first sustaining the second.

Louis proposed to Marguerite that they start their married life with three days of continence. For us also, it is good to take, at certain moments, some distance related to our sexual life, in order to avoid treating one another as some object and to better welcome one another as a subject. It is equally important to speak frequently in a couple, as Louis and Marguerite did. Knowing how speak to each other, knowing how to forgive each other is fundamental in a family and grows through a daily apprenticeship of dialogue.

Sharing:

Now let us read Article 17 of the Rule and Article 24 of our General Constitutions. (See the texts on page 3) Which words or phrases particularly speak to you? Let us find them and share them during 10-15 minutes.

FROM SAINT LOUIS TO TODAY

A group discussion of 10-12 minutes follows which can be animated by the director of formation. This is done with the help of the following texts in which the questions are found.

Relational Life

For us Christians, what maintains the love in a couple? What allows it to come through the years and renew itself? What allows each one to welcome the other in what the other has become, without having chosen it?

Spiritual Life

What are the areas and contexts in resourcing our couple before God? How to return to the source of the sacrament of our marriage? What place does a life of prayer have in our married life? Is it easy for the two of us to pray together? Are we always on the same spiritual « wave length »?

And if we took the time in the next few days to read the declaration of intent written during the course of our marriage preparation, how could we renew it today?

Welcome

We all know, a couple can perhaps go through challenges. What place do we reserve in our family, in our communities, for those persons who are going or have gone through marital difficulties or separations? What support do we offer them?

Transmission

The commitment to a Christian marriage is far from being evident today. The promise of fidelity for life can impress and cause fear. However, in spite of all its demands, can I be a witness to the beauty in the sacrament of marriage? If I could speak to an engaged couple, what words would I chose?

Reflection:

Now, let us listen, in silence, the reading of the Gospel according to Mathew 7, 21.24-29 ... then take a moment for sharing.

Building upon the rock

« Not everyone who says to me: “Lord, Lord!” shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. »

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at this teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. »

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule

Article 17

In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ.

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

General Constitutions

Article 24.1

Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death.

Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.

Life - Objective:

During the month of April, during our fraternal meetings, let us share what we have lived during the time preceding the great feast of Easter...

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

Remind members to pray for the success of the National Elective Chapter in May.

End of the meeting: (a prayer or song chosen by the fraternity)

At home

To continue our reflection, reads the following passage:

LIVING THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Sanctity of marriage and of family

« The Lord Christ has showered blessings on many aspects of this love, stemming from the divine source of charity, and constituting the image of his union with the Church. In effect as well as God had taken in the past the initiative for an alliance of love and fidelity with his people, thus, now, the Saviour of men, the Spouse of the Church, comes to meet Christian couples in the sacrament of marriage. He continues to remain with them so that they, by their mutual gift, can love each other in perpetual fidelity, as he himself has loved the Church and given of himself for her (Ep 5, 25). The true marital love is assumed in divine love and is directed and enriched by the redeeming power of Christ and the saving action of the Church, in order to effectively lead the couples to God, to help and maintain them in their sublime mission of fathers and mothers. This is why Christian couples, to accomplish with dignity the duties of their status, are fortified and as consecrated by a special sacrament in accomplishing their wedded and familial mission with the strength of this sacrament, filled with the Spirit of Christ who imbues all their life with faith, hope and charity, they arrive more and more to their personal perfection and mutual sanctification; this is how that together they contribute to the glorification of God » (*Gaudium et spes. The Church in the world today. § 48.2*).