

‘This woman touching him is a sinner!’

Evangelising our sensuality, sexuality and affectivity

Foresee: A bottle of men’s perfume and another for women; an icon of Christ to preside over the meeting and lit incense sticks.

Welcome and Opening Hymn:

We begin by relating how decisions taken at the preceding meeting were applied. We take stock of changes that have occurred in our spiritual lives thanks to these commitments.

Then the leaders sprinkle a little perfume on each participant, warmly embracing them!

Leader: Since the beginning of the year, we have been seeking to change our way of living in the light of the Gospel. We trust the promises it contains, even if its message is sometimes harsh and upsets us. With this hymn, we repeat our joy of maintaining trust in this Word: (hymn on the theme of love and family-style living).

Prayer¹: *Lord God, strength of those who hope in you; support us in our prayer: because we are weak and can do nothing without you, give us always the help of your grace so that, in fulfilling your commandments, we may please you in all we desire and do. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

1- Let us examine our lives: Let us speak openly and quite directly:

- *What did you feel when welcomed with perfume and hugs?*
- *What do you think of people who are ‘very affectionate’ – flirts – teases – and those who often change partners?*

2- Sung Acclamation of the Word of God (refrain) and proclamation of the Gospel: Lk 7: 36 – 8: 3. After a few moments of silence, re-read the text. Maintain the silence before re-reading.

Deepen the meaning of the reading: Jesus was unmarried and moved freely among women; he brought something atypical to his times by entering into non-romantic bonds of friendship. As a result, he enabled those who were with him to be merciful, to purify their desires, change their lives, and live in family-style intimacy. In this way, emotional expression was evangelised by eliminating the only other options of seduction, rivalry, jealousy and sexual activity.

- *Perfume, submissiveness, kissing, mussing hair, to be touched, love... what do you think of this sensual language in the Gospel context ?*
- *Is there a Christian sexuality?*

¹ Normally, the opening prayer should be spontaneous and led by those conducting the meeting. However, if otherwise unable, we could recite the one proposed, which just happens to be for the 11th Ordinary Sunday.

- *At the end of the passage (8: 1-3) the proclamation of the Gospel is linked to the presence of men and women around Jesus. How do we live out our relations with men and women together?*
- *Has the number of times we have been forgiven by God changed our feelings and our ability to be non-judgmental?*

3- Pray with the Song of Songs². This is a very little known book of the Bible and uses the language of lovers to speak of the Covenant between God and humanity: passions, perfumes, desire, kisses, beautiful images, etc., are at the service of faith. Let us imagine being the woman in the Gospel who is not afraid, ‘because of her great love’, and use this form of address to Jesus, (creator of the New Covenant between God and humanity) in order to evangelise our world of feelings.

Bride: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. Your love is more delightful than wine; delicate is the fragrance of your perfume, your name is an oil poured out.

Bridegroom: *To my mare harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot I compare you, my love. Your cheeks show fair between their pendants and your neck within its necklaces. We shall make you golden earrings and beads of silver.*

Bride: I am black but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of nomads. Take no notice of my swarthy skin; it is the sun that has burnt me. My mother's sons turned their anger on me; they made me look after the vineyards. Had I only looked after my own!

Bridegroom: *How beautiful you are, my love, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves.*

Bride: While the King rests in his own room my nard yields its perfume. My Beloved is a sachet of myrrh lying between my breasts. My Beloved is a cluster of henna flowers among the vines of Engedi.

Bridegroom: *'Come then, my love, my lovely one, come. For see, winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The season of glad songs has come; the cooing of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree is forming its first figs and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance. Come then, my love, my lovely one, come.*

Bride: How beautiful you are, my Beloved, and how delightful! As an apple tree among the trees of the orchard, so is my Beloved among the young men. In his longed-for shade I am seated and his fruit is sweet to my taste I hear my Beloved. See how he comes leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills.

Together: Glory to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit both now and forever, Amen.

4- Putting the Word of God into practice. Although the subject is very intimate and personal, we need to find a way (however discreetly) to express **both** our affection for Jesus **and** our respect for others' lives without judging or condoning; in addition, we need to do so together as men and women of this group! What shall we choose to do?

Let us not forget to prepare the next meeting: place, date, leaders...

Final Hymn - bearing in mind the aim of the meeting.

² These few verses are drawn from chapters 1 - 3. Reading in two choirs: men one side, women the other.

MOVING AHEAD

Some more ideas

- a- Organise a meeting to see how to evangelise the boy-girl and men-women ties in our parish. Perhaps it is time to see our faith intervening in this matter!
- b- Invite a married couple to share on this issue.
- c- If you have a partner, speak together about your way of loving, about respecting one another and about living openly with others...

Readings for discussion:

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT³ YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE

527. What is required by the ninth commandment?

The ninth commandment requires that one overcome carnal concupiscence in thought and in desire. The struggle against such concupiscence entails purifying the heart and practicing the virtue of temperance.

529. How does one reach purity of heart?

In the battle against disordered desires the baptised person is able, by the grace of God, to achieve purity of heart through the virtue and gift of chastity, through purity of intention, purity of vision (both exterior and interior), discipline of the imagination and of feelings and by prayer

530. What are the other requirements for purity?

Purity requires *modesty* which, while protecting the intimate centre of the person, expresses the sensitivity of chastity. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their communion. Purity frees one from widespread eroticism and avoids those things which foster morbid curiosity. Purity also requires a *purification of the social climate* by means of a constant struggle against moral permissiveness which is founded on an erroneous conception of human freedom.

³ From COMPENDIUM of the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH www.vatican.va
(Heading: Basic Texts)