

Mission for the young couples

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Introduction

"The traditional missions, often abandoned too hastily, are indispensable if we are to obtain a periodic and vigorous renewal of Christian life" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae", n.47).

"The catechetical action of the family has a special character and is, under a certain aspect, unreplaceable.... The parents will strive to follow and to reproduce, in the family context, the more methodical formation received elsewhere" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae", n.68).

"The gift of the Spirit is a vital command for the Christian couples, and at the same time a stimulating impulse helping them in their daily progress towards a mutual union always richer at all levels _ at body, character, heart, intelligence and soul levels _, a progress disclosing to the Church and to the whole world the new communion in love, given by the grace of Christ in the Sacrament of Marriage" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio", n.19).

Following these indications of the Magisterium, in the course of the Vincentian Popular Mission, we are trying to dedicate special encounters to the family, during which will develop and grow towards its full maturation not only their human life, but also a concrete life of faith.

Reflection on the theme

1) Description of the experience

In the course of the Popular Mission we propose that a few evenings be devoted to a series of encounters with a reflection on themes involving the life of the couple and the education of their children. Usually we propose three or four evenings, in which we study the life of the couple and its problems, responsible fatherhood and motherhood, the means of having the faith of the couple grow steadily, which is the basis for a life of faith in family. To these encounters are especially invited the young couples, who in the situation of the Christian communities in Italy, are those undergoing the greatest difficulty to practice their faith within the community itself and are also those which have generally to support the burden of the education of children during the first years of their growing.

The "Direttorio di Pastorale Familiare" published by the Italian Episcopal Conference suggests three points for emphasis:

- a) looking for these young couples,
- b) accepting as a value their presence in the community,
- c) accompanying all the young couples, in order to help them live their vocation and mission, overcoming the first "crises" which can spring up.

The Vincentian Popular Mission, follows this process:

- a) during the Pre-Mission (a time when the Pastor and his Council should be looking for the young couples),
- b) during the Mission itself (receiving the couples in the encounters specially programmed for them),
- c) during the Post-Mission (proposing the formation of a group which will study family spirituality in order to follow the new paths opened by the Mission).

2) Results obtained and problems met

Once these encounters have been programmed and the Pastor with his Council have succeeded in the task of looking for and inviting the couples to the encounters, those who have accepted to come have always manifested a great interest in the themes studied; one can say that there is really a sincere research of light in the Word of God and in the Magisterium of the Church, in order to be able to live in joy and peace the first years of their experience of a Christian family.

The biggest difficulties met, as far as this method of encounters for the couples is concerned, is the tendency many among them have to live in a certain seclusion from others; the problem of how "to find time" in order to share in these encounters: sometimes an "insufficient knowledge" of their presence, as far as the Christian community itself is concerned.

The Popular Mission is often the opportunity to "discover" these couples and to begin a new way of meeting them.

3) Lessons for the future

As Vincentian missionaries we can

- a) be a stimulus to the Christian communities, helping them to stay attentive to the evangelisation of the young families,
- b) provoking, during the time of the Mission itself, a "joyful experience" of encounters for the young couples themselves, an experience which will go on after the Mission as a "group of family spirituality".

4) How this can respond to the problem of those "far from the church"

The young couples are coming from various experiences of faith, and sometimes from periods of having been far from the faith. The proposal of a way of reflection is a precious opportunity to "re-discover" values which have become drowsy but can regain enthusiasm and vigour. The "Group of Family Spirituality" which could prolong the experience lived during the Mission will be a support to this re-discovering and a help for continuity.

5) A contribution to the actualization of the vincentian mission

Working in the field of young couples stimulates a continuous newness of announcing the Gospel, since it compels the missionary to be nearer to the concrete situations of life; this

leads to a continuous renewal in the various fields of human sciences and in a deepening of the spirituality specific to the Christian Marriage.

A large space can be opened with the effective cooperation of young couples who, during the Popular Mission, join in the animation of these specific encounters for young couples.

It is a new way of doing things, which actualizes the attention brought by Saint Vincent, in his days, to all the categories of persons to whom he was bringing the announcement of the Gospel.

It is a way of being concerned by one of the "new poverties" of our times, in the fields of spiritual life, and of life of faith.