

MILAN - World Meeting of Families

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1 June 2012 MILAN - SAN SIMPLICIANO TIME 15.00

We first arrived at the S. Antonio Boves (Cuneo) Sanctuary 14 years ago with the intent of offering the opportunity of living an “original” experience of spiritual exercises to whomever desired to do so.

During these years, we have tried to formulate our offer so that it would be focussed and fulfilling, especially for couples and families. They have been educative years for us, reviewing our affective history and listening to the many stories told to us. The substance of what we offer lies right there: *in listening to ourselves and to others in light of the Bible’s teachings and the Ignatius method.*

→ During this journey we have been able to ascertain how *the world of affections expresses an irreplaceable opportunity for approaching human experience in a significant way.* It is through affective bonds that we can test our ability to relate with the world in general and more specifically, with our neighbour.

Our greatest expectations pass through our affective life, just like our greatest resistance and reticence. Affections belong to the normal and rational life, but we should perhaps give a greater impulse to the understanding of what, in substance, determines the affective dimension.

→ We have learned that *intimacy* (in the more evangelical sense, proximity) is the experience that qualifies the life of affections because it shows us for what we are and for what we desire. It is intimacy that generates relationship, receptiveness, hospitality and solidarity. And it is intimacy, so we believe, that *orientates and founds* the relationships of the couple and the family. But, we must be educated in intimacy.

If we think about it, the affective dimension is the basic “issue” that is very much at the heart of every person, it is where people experience their greatest joys but also their sorrows and deepest sufferings. Perhaps it is for these reasons that it is a space where we are given the opportunity to approach the *mystery of one God which takes substantial form in the affectivity of a Father* in a real and exclusive way.

→ Spiritual experience is the experiencing of a relationship where the transcendent is made comprehensible in an intimate relationship. To do this we must refine *our hearing* with respect to real life, develop a new *awareness of thought* with respect to living what we have been given, open ourselves up to the possibility of *showing ourselves* for what we really are. To develop these attentions means practicing discernment in the spiritual life of the couple and the family.

What we, during these years, have tried to experience at S. Antonio by bringing the Ignatian spirituality tradition within the context of the affective life of couples and families, has taught us this: the spiritual life of the family assumes an orientation and a sense when the couple continues to grow in the awareness of a choice expressed through the ever-novel uniqueness of the marriage sacrament. An awareness which cannot be taken for granted given the inevitable changes in family life.

→ The practice of discernment *relates spiritual life with real life*, because everything that we experience or perceive with our senses, that we experience through our affections, vindicates a method that makes it possible to approach concrete life, otherwise the reasons for choice would slacken. Let’s think of how a prospect of this kind can dialogue with the world in which we live today and especially where our children live, a world where it seems that things, on principle, cannot last.

Discernment gives a possible answer to the widespread and palpable desire to give a recognizable direction to existentialist choices, exactly there, where everything seems precarious, provisional, and temporary.

→ Consequently, our experience here at the S. Antonio Boves Sanctuary has convinced us that the family needs a single, great help: *the freedom to be able to count on itself*, which in concrete terms means an enhancement of its identity (a place of relationships where diversity becomes a resource), and a combination of material and spiritual support so that it can communicate simply the experience of a love that saves.

The family needs to find opportunities in civil life as well as ecclesiastical life, in order to testify in a “simple way” *a possible intimacy*, not uprooted from its context but within the possibilities of life, giving value to ordinariness, disproving the idea that the ordinary coincides with boredom and habit, becoming a space in which the normality of human life regains value.

Who, if not the family in today’s society can testify to the *beauty of life in its ordinary manifestation*?

If families today were helped and encouraged to say this simple but fundamental prospect of the normality of existence, they would give a very important contribution to the search for a sense that many men and women of our time are searching for.

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