



## Freedom & Commitment

*Dwight & Christine Gonsalves*

Greetings to all. It is indeed an honour and a privilege for us to be here in Fatima with you our Teams family, at this historical gathering, where the Teams of Our Lady movement ready's and strengthens itself, so as to prepare everyone of us, to offer hope, and springs of water, to a world that is fast becoming dry, parched and chaotic.

Father Raniero Cantalembessa, the Pontifical household preacher says" this Gospel of Luke is one of the most celebrated of all four Gospels, the parable of the prodigal son has the incredible power to act on the mind, heart, imagination and memory." This parable appropriately and divinely continues from the 2012 international gathering, 'The Good Samaritan,' to challenge and mould us into the people and witnesses that God is calling us to be.

I would like to share a joke with you before we continue – I was wondering if the children of this new generation were displaying traits of the prodigal son at an earlier age, when the teacher of my 7-year-old grandson wanted to have a word with me, she explained, that in order to demonstrate the dangers of alcohol, she put a half glass of rum on her desk and put a large earthworm in it, within 5 seconds the worm was dead. She then asked the class "what did you learn from this?" my grandson promptly put his hand up and responded, "Miss, if you drink rum you will not get worms."

Like the worm in the joke, we can find ourselves drowning, even dying in our present circumstances, in our marriages, with our children, our job or some other trial, we try to run away from our pain by indulging in the pleasures of the world, alcohol, TV, food, shopping and so on, pleasures that seem to bring us freedom but really don't last. This could be in fact a form of bondage.

The prodigal son pursued everything he thought would bring him freedom. He probably said to himself good riddance to my father and family. I have felt the same way at times, with our adult children, concerning a property, left by my parents to me, that I want to leave for them, but they do not get the concept



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that, in order to keep this property, everyone has to pitch in, with all their skills, to work hard to keep it in our family and for it to pass down to them and their children, it would be so much easier to sell it and have an easy early retirement, and go on a cruise with Dwight, this seems to me to be freedom!! But I know that the best thing to do, is to follow the example of the father of the prodigal son, wait on them, pray daily, have faith, work hard, and wait for them to come to their senses. Our challenge is to stay committed, to trust, to hope, and to believe in a mighty God who can do anything.

In the parable of the prodigal son, ‘the brother’ in us does not understand love and forgiveness, so even though we may obey, because of our closed heart, we judge others, thinking ourselves superior to them, incapable of truly welcoming sinners. We do not comprehend that God loves us all equally and unconditionally and every one of us depends on his mercy. No matter what we have done, or even what we will do, can we ever be separated from the love and forgiveness of our Father.

While preparing this presentation together, we came to the harsh realization that we are much more like the prodigal son and his brother and much less like the father, than we thought. The prodigal son in each of us, has left us with a natural tendency to sin. We are drawn to the ways of the world around us seeking freedom outside and around the heavenly Father, - which ironically is impossible to achieve, we inevitably instead get trapped.

In our day to day lives we are so easily hurt by our spouses and others, especially when we bravely open ourselves to love. It is almost inevitable that because of sin, once we love, we will hurt each other. What therefore is our response during these times of painful love? Do we withdraw and nurse our hurt feelings and negative thoughts, giving them free reign?

Recently we were asked to do a presentation to a group of 12 couples, foreigners with a different culture to ours who may have been interested in joining the Teams. It was our son’s birthday, but we were not going to miss this opportunity to talk to 12 couples. We made the mistake of not asking our intercessory team to back us up in prayer.

The meeting was held on one of the rainiest days of the year, the women came first, then two hours later the men came, which is late even for us in the



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Caribbean!! The men then proceeded to tell us how things were done in their country in marriage, the women were silent and two of them quietly slipped away. We could hardly get a word in, they were obviously not interested in anything we had to offer. When we left, we were both upset, churning many thoughts in our mind wondering what had really happened? Feeling angry about missing our son's celebrations and for what? Couples who were not interested? I started to tell Dwight that he should not have been speaking so much about the Pope and he retaliated by saying he did not like my approach at all. We continued our homeward journey in silence. The following day we still were not able to fully shake off the negative thoughts and heaviness, until we had a 4am couple prayer and sit down, apologizing and forgiving each other and forgiving that whole group whose culture we couldn't possibly understand and who made us feel uncomfortable. but who we are called to love and respect. Who knows if a seed was not planted?

My personal testimony on unconditional love came from my mother. When I was in my teens and twenty's my behavior and choices were far from what they should have been, and my mother often times would bring this to my attention, but interestingly I never one day felt that she loved me any less. I knew that even with all my shortcomings there was nothing that I could do that could ever take that love away. If I had something to share she would stop whatever she was doing and truly listen with an encouraging and compassionate ear. I share from my heart, that this love that I experienced has brought nourishment, healing, and the self confidence that I needed to find my balance. When I gave my life to the Lord, she said, - what took you so long? I've been praying for you for the last 27 years! This is what I would like to bring to others that I meet, this type of freeing love, but how can I truly bring this to others while not bringing it to my own family?

The road to accomplishing this, true freedom, can sometimes take the course of a long bumpy road or can happen very quickly, but it is always through prayerful endeavours.

Pope Francis on seeing the beauty and power of the Endeavours, and all that they lead to, referred to the Teams as one of the most relevant and important



institutions in the world today and expressed the necessity for us to become a more active part of the Church

Fr. William Jarema, an American Priest and Psychiatrist, asked us in a men's seminar in Trinidad" how many of your fathers have ever said these words to you, I love you,- please stand", of the 67 men there, only one man stood up.

We must pray for faith daily, to let go and let God, to accept His Will in every situation however incomprehensible. We must never give up having Expectations, Hope, Dreams, Desires and Goals. God has a divine plan that will always bring victory and salvation in the end. Our job, is to keep our eyes fixed on him!

God is constantly knocking on the door of our hearts, but we must get up and open that door. With all our failings, imperfections and struggles with sin, God is inviting us to true freedom, not a 90%– 99% surrender – but 100%! Let us pray, so that by the end of this gathering together we can make that leap of faith for ourselves, our families, our movement, and our countries. Let us leave this gathering no longer flying like a sparrow, but to soar like an eagle.

Cindy Leive, editor - in - chief of Glamour magazine, recently wrote –“there is no right age to be awesome, 9 or 91 or anywhere in between, we need the wisdom of the older folks, it suddenly seems not only cool, but necessary. In an increasingly complicated world, we need all the heroes we can get.”

The world need the wisdom and commitment of the Teams Movement and the witness of ordinary heroic couples, singles, widows and priests. In an increasingly complicated world we are all called to strive for peace, joy, and for the balance of body, mind and spirit. To be faithful to the endeavours, and to enjoy the good things that God has given us. Always choose to smile, it brightens up a rainy day, for all who receives it.

May God Bless you and your loved ones and the entire Teams family throughout the World

We love you,

**Dwight & Christine Gonsalves**

Trinidad & Tobago