



TESTIMONY 17/07/2024

Jean-Pierre and Flavienne MBA-ALLOUMBA, Gabon

Testimony on: "Enlightenment and offering according to the passage of Saint Luke's Gospel dedicated to the Disciples of Emmaus".

We are Jean-Pierre and Flavienne MBA-ALLOUMBA. We are from Gabon in Central Africa. Our marital adventure began in the summer of 1989, and we were anointed with the sacrament of marriage on Saturday March 4, 1995, in the parish of Saint Michel in Libreville.

Today, with our modest testimony, we'd like to share with you some of the experiences that the passage from Luke's Gospel dedicated to the Disciples of Emmaus reminds us of. These are in terms of the enlightenment and offering we have lived with the Lord on the light and shadow path of our marriage. But first, allow us to greet all our brothers and sisters from all over the world. A special Shalom to their Eminences, to their Excellencies, to the Reverend Priests and Spiritual Advisors, to the beloved leaders of the Teams, headed by the ERI Leading Couple, Clarita and Edgardo BERNAL with Father Ricardo Londono Dominguez, ERI Spiritual Advisor. Please give them a standing ovation.

In this testimony, we speak of God's luminous presence in our feverish, searching quest for true love (I).

Then we'll talk about the wonders God has worked in our lives as a couple through painful experiences (II).

Finally, we'll look at some of the works that his comforting presence has inspired for the END Movement and for the Church in our country, Gabon (III).

I. God's luminous presence in our feverish, searching quest for true love

At the start of our relationship, we were both very happy, but at the same time, there was a hesitancy in our eyes. We were both people wounded by our pasts. It was in this sort of fear that Flavienne and I were suddenly inspired to have a profound exchange about our real motivations. On the menu for discussion were seemingly innocuous dream stories. Dreams about our intention to live together. The converging elements of each dream led us to pay closer attention to the path we were on. We really had the feeling that someone was secretly speaking to us through our dreams. Who is it who speaks to us facelessly? That's how our journey began, as a couple, in prayer. We reminded ourselves that we may be young students at the age of madness, but we are young Christians. God speaks to his children in a thousand and one ways. And here we are, reminiscing about our childhood memories, our time in church, Flavienne's time with the Daughters of the House of Charity, my time with the Spiritan Fathers and the Blue Sisters.

Eager to make a success of our union, we felt the need to involve the Lord in our journey by means of couple prayer and assiduous participation as a couple in Sunday Eucharist. Our openness to God has dispelled our fear of the future and rebuilt our confidence. In these small steps forward, an expression of our desire for conjugal communion, we were truly determined. Our conjugal dialogue, too, developed gradually. It even gave us a surprising revelation about things Flavienne and I didn't know, but had in common without paying the slightest attention to them. Let me quote them quickly: My wife was born to a polygamous father and an officer in a paramilitary corps, so was I; she was born to the first wife, so was I; she was baptized in the town of Oyem, so was I; she attended the Catholic colleges of Sainte Thérèse d'Angone in Oyem and the Institution Immaculée Conception in Libreville, so did I; she did a



short school stay in Port-Gentil, Gabon's economic capital, as did I; she tried to become a Knight of the Immaculate Conception, as did I; like her, I had a child before marriage, and she began her higher education with Law, as did I. I'll stop here. What a surprise!

All these signs made sense to us. We convinced ourselves that we were made for each other. And it's in Equipes Notre-Dame, the movement we joined just after our religious wedding, that things became clearer for us.

Dear brothers and sisters, as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ is on the road with us. He, the Light of the world, guarantees us his illumination on our often foggy, winding or steep paths. He is our path. Indeed, through baptism we have passed from death to life, from darkness to his marvelous Light (1P2;9). He reassures us in Jn8:12 that "he who follows him will not walk in darkness; he will have the light of life". Our marriage is witness to this.

II) The marvels God has worked in our lives as a couple through painful experiences

In our 34 years of married life, we've known dark days and distress, as many couples do. But we have also had much happiness and countless blessings from the Lord. The Lord forgets no one; sin, too, spares no one. This confirms that "the light shines in the darkness" (Jn1;4). The evil world is busy every day smothering the light of Christ within us, plunging us into discouragement and despair. But God is there, in the depths of our hearts, watching. He embraces us in our joys and trials, according to St Catherine of Siena.

Through the experiences of daily life that we're going to tell you about in a nutshell, we've experienced, at the heart of our distress, the faith that lifts mountains, the powerful hand of this God whom we loved without seeing Him, whom we served without knowing Him. Our commitment to Teams of Our Lady has been the springboard to a greater understanding of the mystery of the Risen Christ, who journeys with us, revealing His will to us.

As for our children, we have had ten; five boys and five girls, and several others in our care, notably those entrusted to us by their parents for school or educational needs. One of our five boys joined the Father's home on March 30, 2022.

So we're a large family, and happy to be so. The experience of a large or blended family is a dreaded one for many couples. The Lord has made it a source of light and teaching for us. It has given us a greater attachment to love, to unity beyond differences. Blended families are the leading family type in our country today. For us as parents and pastoral agents of the Family, this is a happy opportunity to live out catholicity in the domestic church. We have asked the Lord for wisdom and patience to animate our family and prudently manage our financial resources. The Lord has answered our prayers, so that we will never experience the stress of uncomfortable housing or the lack of bread.

Our children have all grown up in a large family home and graduated from high school; all have had their sacraments of Christian initiation, and most are planning to marry. Our youngest child will soon be taking her baccalaureate exam. Two of the girls we mentored have become Religious, one with the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco and the other with the Sisters of Jesus-Mary. Our 27 baptismal godchildren include a priest from the Trinitarian Fathers Community. We have also witnessed the marriage of 22 couples from various nationalities and regions of Gabon. Almost all these wedding godchildren have freely chosen to become members of Equipes Notre-Dame. So, like Abraham, father and mother of a multitude, we are often called to "go", that is, to be attentive to the spiritual needs of this great family community that God has given us. Rest assured, our children and godchildren are very nice; they don't wear us out. They fill us with wonder.



In terms of our professional life, Flavienne is a secondary school teacher in a Gabonese school facing major structural and pedagogical challenges. In the interests of her pupils, Flavienne has accepted to hold the chalk until today, because we have to reconcile our profession with our missionary service, lived as a consecration to the Lord.

I, Jean-Pierre, have also been lucky enough not to have been professionally mobile. Passionate about law, I've been a legal advisor in senior management for 32 years, in the same position, with the same enthusiasm and the same competence. I saw this situation of stagnation as a providential factor enabling me to accomplish without too much constraint the increasingly clear mission that God has entrusted to me in the service to His Church and the END Movement.

Flavienne and I are lay people in the purest sense of the word, harmoniously reconciling our spiritual and civic lives. Our commitment as a couple leaves none of our bosses indifferent; they recognize that the protection of marriage and family values is a necessity for our society.

In terms of our married and family life, we have been shaken several times in our health and even in our church mission. Speaking of health, three of our children and my husband Jean-Pierre have been exposed to mortal danger. And each time, they have risen miraculously, according to the doctors. Christ is risen, truly risen!

Our eldest son, aged 9 in 2004, found himself in intensive care for over 12 days without food, following surgery. Our life became very dark. The doctors recommended an emergency evacuation by medical plane to Europe to resume the operation. The deadline was two days, after which the doctors declined responsibility. As young civil servants at the time, we couldn't afford such an expense, as the total cost of transport and treatment abroad came to nearly 152,000 Euros (100,000,000 FCFA). In our distress, we made the foolish decision to take out a health insurance policy, even though we had to specify that the patient was in intensive care. With tears in our eyes, Flavienne and I left the same day for the Blessed Sacrament at Saint Pierre Parish in Libreville. Barely a minute after leaving the chapel, where we had entrusted our child's fate to Jesus, the insurance company phoned us, and a woman's voice, a mother's voice, expressed its compassion on the other end of the line, notifying us of its decision to take full responsibility for our child. The child's passport was issued at night by the authorities, thanks to the rosary that we hardly stopped praying. As for the visa for France, we obtained it the next day, on a Tabaski holiday; the French Consul General had had to postpone his trip to a nearby peninsula to come and deliver the visa to our son, who finally traveled to France on time, before returning to us two months later in good health. Christ is risen, truly risen!

The other two children had a very serious infectious disease in 2009 and a damaged lung in 2014. Their prognosis was vital. The child with the critical infection in 2009 saw his parameters return to normal and his symptoms correct on the 7th day of the Novena recommended to us by a Sister of the Blue Sisters of Castres, who is also an END spiritual counsellor. The attending physician never found a scientific explanation for this spectacular healing.

As for the image of the damaged lung resembling that of end-stage tuberculosis, the eminent Professor of Medicine explained that the healing of this lung in four days could only be explained by the fact that the patient's parents were believers and had certainly entrusted their child to God. In this case, science had no solution. Christ is risen, truly risen!

Finally, Jean-Pierre, who was very ill, began a novena to Henri CAFFAREL with team members and a few spiritual advisors, before flying off to Europe to seek a more precise diagnosis, the treatment for which will cost over 32,000 Euros (21,000,000 FCFA). Obviously, the recommended timeframe for finding the money was too short. Jean-Pierre decided to visit the tomb of Father Henri CAFFAREL at



Troussures in the Oise region to ask for his intercession. Returning to Gabon without a solution, doors that had once been closed began to open with unexpected financial help. Jean-Pierre finally gained access to the precious medicine in the West, and was back in shape after three months of treatment.

Song: I will speak of your goodness, of your faithfulness, I will say aloud oh, aloud oh, aloud oh; what you have done for me, I will proclaim the glory of your Name!!!!

III) Some works offered to the glory of the Lord

In conclusion, dear friends, dear priests, the trials of our married life have enabled us to fix our gaze on the Cross of Christ; they have prepared us to experience the wonders of the Lord and to offer ourselves better to him. So, immersed in this love since the beginning of our marriage, we set ourselves fully in motion to proclaim the Lord and serve him by serving our brothers and sisters.

First of all, in Equipes Notre-Dame, where we have always responded joyfully to successive calls from the Lord, right up to our current responsibility as responsible for the Central Province. In Gabon, we initiated two projects in the name of the Lord during our term as Responsible Couple:

- The institution in 2017 of an annual Mass for deceased team members and Spiritual Counselors; these deceased need our prayers;
- The creation in 2018 of the Association des Veuves des équipes Notre-Dame. Being a widow or widower is a passage, a face and a message.

Reinvigorated by our journey within the END and by our participation in 2006 at the 10th International Gathering of END in Lourdes (France) and at the 5th World Meeting of Families in Valencia (Spain), we resolutely put ourselves at the service of the Church of Gabon and particularly of the Archdiocese of Libreville, stronghold of END in Gabon. Our offering to God consisted of:

- From 2007 to 2010, propose and lead a Coordination of Movements involved in Family Pastoral Care to enable them to study, prepare and celebrate together each year the Solemnity of the Holy Family of Nazareth;
- In 2008, the Centre de préparation initiale au mariage de Libreville (Libreville marriage preparation center) was created, and has since become a sub-commission for religious marriage preparation. Today, this platform, supervised by team members, organizes a unique 8-month marriage preparation session for over 200 couples each year, most of whom become members of the END Teams;
- In 2014, we launched a radio program called "Ma famille vivra" (My family will live) on the Marian airwaves in Libreville. The program was launched after the 10th Plenary Assembly of the Bishops of Central Africa, which preceded the two Synods on the Family in Rome in 2015 and 2016;
- In 2009, we launched "Famille en marche", Gabon's first magazine dedicated exclusively to marriage and the family.

Thank you, Lord, for your blessings. Receive glory in all your works. Through the intercession of Father Henri Caffarel, may the Lord protect our families and our END spirituality. May he bring to fruition the commitment of all the baptized. Praised be Jesus Christ, forever and ever.