

LEARNING TO LIVE THE MESSAGE – A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CURSILLO

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As a movement, we have become more aware of the foundational Charism of the Cursillo Movement since the 2003 National Encounter in Cincinnati, OH. In this article, we will continue to explore the Charism by taking a journey through the 15 Rollos of the Cursillo weekend.

The key to understanding our movement is to understand the key messages found in each one of the weekend Rollos and then how that fits with the underlying message of our movement which is: “God Loves You.” The weekend Rollos follow along two separate, but interwoven, strands. There are the spiritual or mystical Rollos given by the Spiritual Director and the lay Rollos given by the lay person. Each Rollo has a specific message to convey and as we’ve often heard, each Rollo builds on the one that precedes it. Following is a brief overview of the process the Rollos follow.

The first spiritual Rollo introduces the candidates to the possibility of living the divine life, which is achieved through **Habitual Grace**. The rest of the spiritual Rollos build on that initial idea. The divine life is possible only through the gift of **Actual Grace**, which we find in the **Sacraments**, our ongoing contact with God. We must always be on guard against the enemy who tries to put **Obstacles** on our path to holiness. In his final Rollo on the weekend, the Spiritual Director then introduces the Service Sheet as a tool to help the candidates make some concrete commitments to live a balanced **Life in Grace**.

The Lay Rollos also follow a set pattern that is very clearly laid out in the Manifesto written by Eduardo Bonnín. In it he states that the process of the Lay Rollos is:

That man can be more and better through his **Ideal**. He can be it from where he is as a **Layperson in the Church**; discovering his heart through **Piety**, using his intelligence with conviction in his **Study**, which then leads him to put his will in motion through his **Action**; the final outcome of this being that he throws his whole being into becoming a **Leader**. As a leader he conducts a **Study of the Environment**, learning to understand more about the different people he comes in contact with, and whom he can help as part of a **Christianity in Action**. However, as a **Cursillista Beyond the Cursillo**, he knows it must be done in a personal way, in the ongoing friendship and support that is found in the Group Reunion and Ultreya, which gives him **Total Security**.

Each time we begin a Cursillo weekend, the team embarks on a journey with the candidates – a journey that is always a fateful trip. Fateful in that the outcome of the weekend should be a particular, predetermined destination, and if we as leaders, understand what that destination is meant to be, then we stand a much better chance of getting there. Therefore, let us embark on this journey and take a more in-depth look at

the key messages of each Rollo and explore how the strands of the spiritual Rollos and the Lay Rollos are so neatly woven together.

On Friday morning, the initial Rollo almost seems like an anomaly in the grand scheme of the weekend. The candidates have most likely had the weekend explained to them as a marvelous opportunity to spend some time with God; which would have been further reinforced by the silent retreat the night before and the messages contained in the morning meditations. We set them up and then start off with the **Ideal** Rollo, which makes absolutely no mention of God, faith, Church, or anything whatsoever to do with the spiritual life. In this Rollo we are charged with explaining what an Ideal is and how important it is for each one of us to have one. What is implied, but never mentioned, is that our Ideal must be fixed on God and then Grace will both enhance it and provide the driving force for it.

What makes this Rollo unique in the method of the weekend is that it is specifically designed to knock people down, to shatter any false ideals that they may be holding onto. In the technique section in the outline, they use the analogy of someone masquerading as a nonchalant visitor in order to sneak a bomb into a castle; kind of meandering around the building from room to room until he reaches the heart of the fortress where he drops the bomb, in this case being the final phrase of the Rollo – “What is your Ideal?” The Rollo ends abruptly with that phrase and the speaker beats a hasty retreat.

Once the candidates have had any false ideals shattered, they are ready to hear the message contained in the Rollo on **Habitual Grace**. In this Rollo, the Spiritual Director introduces the candidates to the concept that each one of them is the physical manifestation of the hopes and dreams of God the Father; a Father who loves us so much and who wants only the best for us. He calls us to enter into a deeper intimacy with Him as his beloved sons and daughters, as temples of the Holy Spirit and turn away from anything that would keep us apart from Him.

Grace itself is a free gift from God that sanctifies us and makes us holy, a gift we can either accept or reject. This idea of personal freedom is an important concept in the Cursillo Movement. God always invites a response from us, He never demands one. The message of this Rollo extends a compelling invitation to enter into a new and deeper relationship with our Father in Heaven. An invitation that none of us can afford to ignore.

Once that invitation has been accepted, one becomes a true **Layperson in the Church**. But what does that mean? Isn't that what we already are? For some people, yes, this is already true, but for many others this Rollo can be an eye opener. Being a layperson in the Church means more than just showing up for Mass on Sunday. Each one of us has a mission to personify Christ in all the circumstances of our lives – at work, at play, and in our families. As laypersons, we are responsible for the salvation of those around us in the ‘real world’. Most of the laypersons in our day-to-day lives have no contact with the hierarchical members of the Church. Their only contact with the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is with you and me; as laypersons in the Church who live in the world. St. Francis once said that we are often the only Gospel some people will ever read,

therefore each layperson in the Church is charged with the responsibility of transforming the world simply by living in Grace, and then letting that Grace make their lives a living translation of the Gospel in everything they do. Pope John XXIII summed up this idea when he said: “the Christian is a joy, a joy to himself, to God, and to his fellow men.”

The Rollo on **Actual Grace** picks up where the one on Habitual Grace left off and focuses more on our individual response to God’s invitation to a deeper relationship with Him. It proposes to the candidates that, with God’s help, it is possible to achieve the ideal that the Cursillo sets forth. Actual Grace is what helps us to overcome obstacles in order to sanctify our lives as Christians. This Rollo sees the introduction of the catchphrase – Christ and I are an overwhelming majority – which really emphasizes the need for us to rely on Christ in all that we do for Him. God offers many graces to us, and always makes them available when we need them. However, the responsibility for reaching out and accepting these graces lays with us, which again emphasizes that freedom which God has entrusted to each one of us, freedom to either accept or reject His gifts. Prayer is also a key component of Actual Grace and the power of prayer is dramatically demonstrated to the candidates by the introduction of *palanca*; the prayers and sacrifices that others have offered on their behalf, so that they may obtain the graces that are available to them in the Cursillo weekend.

So far, the Rollos on the Cursillo have been mostly informational. The Rollo on **Piety** starts getting into practicalities and begins the process of showing the candidates how they can start to put these ideas into practice in their day-to-day lives. Strictly speaking, piety is nothing more than the orientation of our whole lives towards God. Before we can be successful at that, however, we must make sure that we shed any vestiges of the false piety we see demonstrated in the descriptions of the Sanctimonious, the Practitioners, and the Pharisees. In order to prevent ourselves from reverting to those styles of piety, we need to strive to be natural, courageous, strong, and joyful in our response to God.

In the Piety Rollo we are called to live our lives in Grace, which is what gives us the strength necessary for the task at hand. Our piety is dependent on remaining in Grace and recognizing the difficulties we face within ourselves and along our way that cause us to fall. Our piety must be active, consciously seeking to understand our motives for doing things, that is, knowing why we ‘do the things we do’. A key message of the Piety Rollo is that, if an Ideal is the sum of ideas, plans, or goals that drive us to achieve an objective, and then Piety is an Ideal because it is the dedication of our whole life towards God. As active Christians who are striving to live out our Christianity in a deeper way, our piety will be perfected by bringing about this life of piety in others, so that Christ may live in them also; so that they may also live a life in Grace in a conscious and ever-growing manner. The Piety Rollo concludes the first phase of the Cursillo weekend. If the team has done their job well, the candidates will have begun to make that allimportant **encounter with self** that is crucial to the successful outcome of the weekend in their lives.

On the second day of the Cursillo we carry on with some more of the practical aspects of living a Christian life. The underlying theme of the day is to provide the environment necessary for the candidates to have and **encounter with Christ**.

In the **Study** Rollo, the candidates are introduced to a different way of looking at study. In this Rollo we're not talking about the kind of formation that comes from the acquisition of knowledge; knowledge that illustrates but does not oblige, that can awaken but not illuminate and that can destroy but not convince. In the Cursillo, Study is putting our intelligence at the service of the Truth so that our endeavors for the Lord will be the most effective. The object of our study is very neatly summed up in the words of St. Augustine, "Lord Jesus, let me know myself and know You". In our study we are challenged to look at ourselves to see what is getting in the way of our becoming the saints that God wants us to be. Our study of God should help us to understand that he is a living, personal being who loves us and wants only the best for us.

Study is what gives meaning and depth to our Piety and direction to our Action. It is not meant to make us comfortable, but rather, it should spur us on to understanding the Gift of God and then looking at everything in our lives in the light of that knowledge. There are many books that are indispensable to sustain the inner chassis of our ideas and others that will help strengthen it for us. A very simple analogy here would be like the oil and gasoline that are found in an engine. The oil keeps the engine lubricated and movable and the gasoline is the fuel that keeps it running. We need to keep those books that sustain us and read the ones that inspire us to do more.

In order to further strengthen our spiritual life, we need the ongoing contact with God that is available to us in the **Sacraments**. Those who rely on the Grace of God can do great things in His name. An important message contained in this Rollo is that we must learn to live in close contact with God, the Divine Power who works in our lives through the reception of the Sacraments. In the Holy Eucharist we have more than just contact with Christ. In the reception of the Eucharist we become united with Him and then gradually transformed into Him through the power of His love for us. This Rollo is a key piece in the process of the encounter with Christ. In it, Christ asks us to consider what He has done for us and then He asks us to tell Him what we can and will do for Him.

What can I do for him? God has entrusted the salvation of so many people to our response to His call. In the **Action** Rollo we are reminded of Christ's commandment to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourselves. God loves the people we encounter in our day-today lives just as much as He loves us. He wants the best for them and needs our help in order to bring about that transformation in their lives. As St. Teresa said, 'Christ has no hands or feet on earth but yours'. In this Rollo the candidates are presented with the concept of reaching out to people and making friends with them. As the relationship develops and deepens, they become friends. The next logical step is to introduce these friends to our best friend, Christ, and to help our friends get to know Him as we do. This is the simple method the Cursillo Movement proposes in order to evangelize those around us as we work to spread the Kingdom of God in the world. As Cursillistas, we're not asked to become door-to-door evangelists; we are to just simply reach out in friendship to our fellow man.

Being a laborer in the vineyard of the Lord, though, is not without its problems. Satan is always hiding just around the corner ready to trip us and snatch away the peace we have when we're living in Grace. In the Rollo on **Obstacles to a Life in Grace**, the Spiritual Director helps the candidates to recognize that sin is a reality in our lives here on earth. We are all subject to temptation and can and do fall into sin. This Rollo addresses the many preventive measures available to us in order to help us avoid falling into sin; measures such as prayer, mortification, spiritual direction, and turning away from the occasion of sin. By availing ourselves of these remedies we can turn these obstacles into hurdles rather than roadblocks on our path to holiness.

As we travel along this path to holiness, God calls us to go deep within ourselves and discern how we can use all the talents He has given us. He is calling each one of us to be **Leaders** within our own environments. As people who are actively and humbly living out our faith in our daily lives, we do have the ability to bring His message of hope to so many people who are waiting to hear it; and Christ is counting on each one of us to do our part in advancing His Kingdom here on earth. The candidates learn that leaders within the Cursillo Movement are those who listen to God's call and are willing to devote themselves to the apostolic actions He has put before them. He is always calling us to do marvelous things in His name and with His help. People who joyfully and freely respond to that call are leaders.

By the end of the second day of the Cursillo, the candidates have started to open up and get to know each other better. Most of the candidates, by this point in the weekend, have made the encounter with self and with Christ and the weekend has taken on a more relaxed atmosphere.

On the third day, though, things quickly get down to business. In the **Study of the Environment** Rollo each of the candidates are challenged to look around at the people in their environments in regards to their existing relationships with God. This Rollo starts the process of the **encounter with others**, the people God is calling us to share His Good News with, starting with ourselves.

Why do we start with ourselves? In order to be effective in convincing others that we have found the Truth, a compelling Truth that must be shared, we ourselves must be convinced of its value. If we are lukewarm in our own beliefs, we stand very little chance of passing those beliefs on to anyone around us. By studying our environments, we can identify people who are most likely to respond to the message so that we don't waste our time or our efforts. The groups who are likely to be the most receptive to this message are those who believe in God, love God, and want to "do good" and those who don't believe in God because they ignore him. In other words, don't waste time fishing where the fish don't bite.

In this Rollo a key set of evangelization tactics are presented to the candidates. In order to evangelize ourselves we must first use our will, then prayer, our mind, and lastly our hearts in order to become more like Christ. When we approach others, though, we must

first appeal to their heart, then their mind, their will, and finally, Grace from God will lead them to pray.

In the Rollo on the **Life in Grace**, the Spiritual Director gives the candidates some very valuable advice on how to effectively live the Christian Life and further their own spiritual growth. In this Rollo the candidates are introduced to the Service Sheet and encouraged to make a commitment to themselves and to God as to what specific means of piety they will use in order to deepen their relationship with Him.

Living as a Christian in today's world isn't easy, but it can be done. It's much easier, though, when we have friends to journey along with us. People who are walking along the same path, people who can help keep us on track when we wander off, people who are living witnesses to the effectiveness of a **Christianity in Action**. Christianity in Action is a group of grace-filled Christians who journey together in a climate that makes it possible for each one to live and spread the Gospel in the world. The message that really needs to be understood in this Rollo is that we come together in groups in order to encourage each other as we work for the conversion of the world around us.

The end of the Cursillo weekend is rapidly approaching and the candidates need to start thinking about what it means to be a **Cursillista Beyond the Cursillo**. By this point, many of them are all fired up and raring to go; ready to get on with their mission to spread the Good News of God's love for each and every one of us. This Rollo serves to provide a bit of reality check to their enthusiasm.

Once we have embarked on our mission, there are two dangers that we need to watch out for. The first one is the belief that we are something, that we can accomplish this mission on our own, without God's help. The second one is the opposite, the belief that we are nothing, that we are incapable of effecting any change to our environments.

There are two very simple solutions to these pitfalls. The first one is contact with Christ. Christ comes to us in the Holy Eucharist and gives us strength. He also speaks His word to us through the Gospel and in the interpretation of the Gospel in the homilies at Mass. The second solution is contact with our brothers and sisters, especially in the Group Reunion. This solution is double-edged as there are people we come in contact with that improve us, but there are also others that would improve if we would do so. This is an important part of the journeying process, we grow in faith together, and through this growth we become sanctified.

Our three day journey is about to come to an end, but before we send the candidates on their way, we finally come to the pinnacle of the weekend, the Rollo that introduces the method of Group Reunion. If this Rollo is presented well, the candidates will want to become part of a Group Reunion. Once the decision has been made that they would like to do this, then the other considerations come, with whom would they like to form a Group Reunion? With whom should they form a Group Reunion? These are very important questions to consider since we've just heard that contact with others can improve our spiritual life as well as improve theirs. In the Group Reunions there must

truly be a climate of friendship and generosity in order for the group to function well. Sharing our faith journey with our brothers and sisters in our group; our joys as well as our sorrows and difficulties, is the only way to ensure that in the Group Reunion we are living our Christianity together with each other, for if we do not live it together with others, it is not really lived.

The Group Reunion as well as the Ultreya gives us that support we need as we continue the process of our own conversion in which we deepen our friendship with Christ, becoming more and more convinced of God's infinite love for us – and this is where we find **Total Security**.

The weekend is over; the 3-day journey is complete! If we as a team have successfully completed our mission, we will have guided the new Cursillistas back to the environments where they came from. As a movement, the message we need to convey to the candidates, and sometimes even to our fellow Cursillistas, is that, with the help of Christ and our friends, it is possible to live as a Christian in today's world, in our environments, despite the opposition we face. But, in order to do that, we as a movement must also come to a thorough understanding that the Cursillo weekend is not the whole of the movement; it is merely a springboard to this new way of life; a life that we ourselves can bear witness to; a life that is lived right where we are. Life as a Cursillista, then, is simply normal, everyday life that is lived in the company of our fellow pilgrims, but seen through new eyes, God's eyes.