

LEARNING TO LIVE THE MESSAGE—A JOURNEY THROUGH THE WEEKEND ROLLOS

....or

How to Avoid Getting Stranded on Gilligan's Island

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I've been asked to take you on a trip – a journey through all 15 Rollos of the Cursillo weekend. As I was pondering how to approach this, there was a crazy thought that kept running through my mind.... the theme song from Gilligan's Island. (What can I say...I'm weird!) The more I thought about it, though, the more I realized that it does present a very fitting analogy for us, which I'll explain as we go along. So, sit right back and you'll hear a tale....

For the past several conferences we've been exploring the foundational Charism of the Cursillo movement, and at the past few conferences we've been taking a closer look at some of the weekend Rollo outlines as they were originally developed; prior to the various changes that have been introduced over the years. Last year we achieved a major milestone in our Canadian movement by making an English translation available of those original Mallorcan outlines. This was a first for the English-speaking movement worldwide! Our good friends south of the border have also started on a similar journey of their own to rediscover for themselves the foundational Charism of our movement.

The key to understanding our movement is, of course, understanding the key messages found in each one of the weekend Rollos, and then how that fits in with the underlying message of our movement, which is that "God Loves You." The weekend Rollos follow along 2 separate, but interwoven, strands. There are the spiritual, or mystical, Rollos given by the Spiritual Director; and the lay Rollos, which are given by ordinary folks such as you and I. Each Rollo has a specific message to convey, and as we have so often heard, each Rollo also builds on the ones that precede it.

Before I dig deeper into the actual message of each of the Rollos, though, I'm going to give you a brief overview of the process they follow.

The first spiritual Rollo introduces the candidates to the possibility of living the divine life, which is achieved through **Habitual Grace**¹. The rest of the spiritual Rollos build on that initial idea. The

¹ *What is typically called 'habitual grace' in the Cursillo literature is also known as 'sanctifying grace.' It is said that when we are baptized we are given a share in the life of Christ. It is difficult to say exactly what constitutes that, but we call it grace. It is not so much a quantity (this much or that much grace) as a quality -- something that makes a difference in who we are. Through grace we are incorporated into the Body of Christ. When it is said that we 'grow in grace,' that means that the life of grace is lived more intensely in us, not that there is a greater quantity of grace. Sanctifying grace is, then, the life principle of a higher than natural (supernatural) kind of life in us. It is intended to be permanent in us, growing through the celebration of the sacraments, prayer and good works, and is lost only through what is traditionally called 'mortal' sin. (It is called mortal because it snuffs out the supernatural life in us.)*

*What is called 'actual grace' in the Cursillo literature is sometimes called 'helping grace.' It is the transitory help that we receive to do some particular Christian act. Whenever one is called on to do something specifically Christian, it is appropriate to ask God for help to do this. That help is then 'actual' grace. It is also possible, of course, to ask God to give the required help to another person who is trying to do something specifically Christian -- hence *palanca* -- prayers and sacrifices offered in order to ask God to help those who are now engaged in the Cursillo weekend (or whatever Christian action one might be engaged in). So, whereas habitual or sanctifying grace is a life principle, qualitative and meant to be permanent, actual grace is a transitory help given for a specific act or series of acts.*

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 his 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 After 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. So, think of Gilligan and the Skipper as representing the team. In the song, the Skipper is described as brave and sure. We really need people like the Skipper, people who are seasoned, know what the destination is, and how to weather the storms along the way, in order to reach that final destination. Our teams also need the Gilligans. People who are generous, full of enthusiasm, eager to learn, and most importantly, can take direction from others. In short, our teams are made up of a mixture of people whose skills and knowledge complement each other. The candidates, of course, are represented by the 5 passengers; a broad cross-section of people from all walks of life. Everyone boards the tiny ship at the start of the weekend and they set sail for a 3-day rather than a 3-hour journey.

So, I invite you now to embark on this trip with me as we take a more in-depth look at those key messages of each Rollo and explore how the strands of the spiritual Rollos and the lay Rollos are so neatly woven together. We're going to join the journey after breakfast on the first full day of the Cursillo weekend.

At first glance, this initial Rollo almost seems like an anomaly in the grand scheme of the weekend. The candidates have most likely had this weekend explained to them as a marvellous 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,

Suppose a Rollista is about to present his or her rollo, and starts with a prayer to the Holy Spirit to help him/her to do it well. It is clear that what one is asking for in this instance is actual grace. What is not so obvious is that what prompts one to ask in the first place is the habitual or sanctifying grace by which one lives the supernatural Christian life. If one were not living this Christian life of sanctifying grace, one would likely not want to give a rollo, let alone pray for help in giving it. The more intensely one lives the life of (habitual, sanctifying) grace, the more likely one is to engage in Christian action and to ask for the (actual, helping) grace to do so. Fr. Syd Miffen, Sp. Advisor to CCCC

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.

Up until not that long ago, I never really got this Rollo...I think it was the Science lesson at the beginning that would immediately start to lose me. I always felt pretty confident, though, that my Ideal was in the right place. It wasn't until I was reading something one day that I really finally understood that my ultimate Ideal should be, as the old Baltimore Catechism put it, "to know, love, and serve God in this world and to be happy with him in the next." I'd gotten the 'serving' part figured out, but I was missing the whole knowing and loving aspect of 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 Rollista beats a hasty retreat.

At this point in the weekend, the weather can already start getting rough. We've all probably heard of candidates who have wanted to leave the Cursillo weekend, before it has really started to unfold, simply because of the secular nature of this Rollo. The Skipper's experience in weathering storms can certainly be invaluable in these situations.

Once the candidates have had any false ideals shattered, they are ready to hear the message contained in the Rollo on **Habitual Grace**, which in our current literature is simply called **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 to 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 very eye opening. Being a layperson in the Church means more than just showing up for Mass on Sunday and occupying a pew. 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 people 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.”

As Laypersons in the Church, we need to strengthen ourselves with **Actual Grace** in order to successfully carry out our mission. If the title of this Rollo seems unfamiliar to you, it's because in our current literature this Rollo has been renamed **Faith**. So, how did a Rollo on Actual Grace end up becoming a Rollo on Faith? Well, when the Rollo outlines were being revised in the late 1970's the guiding thought behind the change was to accentuate the human response to Grace, which is Faith. It's a rather confusing change and one that Eduardo Bonnín certainly did not agree with. I never really thought about this until the last Cursillo I worked on, when one of the candidates at my table leaned over to me during the Rollo and whispered, ‘why is this Rollo called Faith when he keeps talking about Grace?’

The outline contents for both Actual Grace and Faith are quite similar, so what I'm about to describe should sound familiar to you.

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 largely 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 dependant 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 too; so that they may also live a life in Grace in a conscious and ever-growing manner. That is, living Christianity to the full.

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 all-important encounter with self that is crucial to the successful outcome of the weekend in their lives. This first day of the Cursillo can often have many patches of rough water and it often takes a skilful crew to keep the little ship afloat without the loss of any passengers. Each team member is an integral part of the crew and has a distinct part to play in keeping the ship on course.

On the second day of the Cursillo we carry on with some more of the practical aspects of living a Christian life and the waters should be a bit calmer. The underlying theme of the day is to provide the environment necessary for the candidates to have an 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 endeavours 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 neighbours as ourselves. God loves the people we encounter in our day-to-day 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, the friendship deepens and 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 labourer in the vineyard of the Lord, though, is not without its problems. Satan is always hiding just around the corner; ready to trip us up 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 occasions 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 marvellous 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 little ship has usually landed on a tropical island. The storms of the day before have pretty much subsided and the passengers and crew 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. This beautiful tropical island is sheltered from the many cares and concerns of everyday life. Maybe we'd all like to just stay here for a while.

On the third morning, though, things quickly get down to business. In the **Study of Environments** 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 encountering 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 those 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 evangelizational 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. In our local movement we have always advised the candidates to complete their Service Sheets in pencil, as it is good practice to periodically review their commitments to determine if they are effective or need to be re-evaluated.

During this Rollo, our Spiritual Director always cautions us to look at our priorities and make sure they're in the right order. We must have God at the centre of our lives, ensuring that our relationship with Him comes first. After that, we have a responsibility to fulfill the commitment to our vocation, for many of us as laypersons, that is our families. The next priority is our avocation – our jobs, the things we do to pay the bills. What is surprising to most people, though, is that the item at the bottom of our priority list should be our apostolate, or apostolic action. It's interesting where that fits in, isn't it?

Living as a Christian in today's world isn't easy, but it can be done. It's much easier, though, when we have some 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**.

Last year we heard that a 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; and that this Rollo sets the stage for the final Rollo on the group reunion and Ultreya. The message that really needs to be understood in this Rollo, though, is that we come together in groups in order to encourage each other as we work for the conversion of the world around us. Even though our apostolate should come last on our priority list, it is still there and there is work to be done. And, finally, although I'm sure that most of us wish He would just pick up the phone or send us an e-mail telling us what He wants us to do, God most often speaks to us through other people; therefore, the members of our Christianity in Action can help us as we discern where He's leading 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 After the Cursillo**. By this point, many of them are all fired up and raring to go; kind of like a fleet of energizer bunnies all charged up and 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 a 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 3-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 give 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 wonderful love for us – and this is where we find **Total Security**.

The weekend is now over, the 3-day journey is complete. If we as a team, as the crew of the little ship, have successfully completed our mission, we will have brought the new Cursillistas back to the same port we embarked from on that first night.

The reality for us in the English-speaking movement, though, is that by the time most of us got involved in Cursillo, we were no longer starting out from the original port. The Minnow had had many mishaps along the way and some of the original ideas were lost, sometimes quite literally in the translation. The castaways have always tried to make the best of things and, at times, it certainly has been an uphill climb. Gilligan and the Skipper have definitely toiled long and hard to make everyone comfortable in this lovely tropic island nest. The Howells, Ginger, the Professor, and Mary Anne, as new Cursillistas who have joined the crew, have also contributed their own ideas and efforts to this cause, and the island has almost become a desirable place to be stranded.

As Cursillistas, though, we don't really live on a tropical island full of colourful roosters and butterflies, with a vibrant rainbow stretching across the sky. Life as a Cursillista is meant to be lived on the mainland, in our own homeport. We have been to the island and been transformed by the beauty we found there, but we must leave the island and bring that beauty back with us in order to brighten the environments of our day to day lives.

There have been so many tourists who have come and visited our island. It's been a pleasant sojourn for most of them, but the memory soon fades and then it's back to business as usual. The island has had an effect on them, but it hasn't transformed them. As a movement, we must truly understand that the why of the weekend is not to keep bringing in more tourists, but to make new friends for the journey, fellow pilgrims along the way.

The message that 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 own 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.