



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE OFFICIALS OF THE TRIBUNAL OF THE ROMAN ROTA
FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE JUDICIAL YEAR***Clementine Hall
Friday, 22 January 2016*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear Brothers,

I extend a warm welcome to you and I thank the Dean for his introductory remarks.

The ministry of the [Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota](#) has always been an auxiliary to the Successor of Peter in order that the Church, irrevocably connected with the family, might continue to proclaim the plan of God, the Creator and Redeemer, for the sacredness and beauty of the institution of the family. It is an ever-timely mission but particularly relevant in our day.

Along with the definition of the Roman Rota as *Tribunal of the family*¹ I would like to highlight its other prerogative, namely, that it is the *Tribunal of the truth of the sacred bond*. These two aspects are complementary.

The Church can, indeed, show God's unfailing and merciful love toward families, particularly toward those wounded by sin and the trials of life, and proclaim the irrevocable truth of marriage according to God's plan. This service is primarily entrusted to the Pope and to Bishops.

Throughout the Synod on the family, begun by the grace of God two years ago, we were able to accomplish deep and sapiential discernment in a spirit and manner of true collegiality. It is out of this that the Church has indicated to the world that, among other things, there can be no confusion between the family desired by God and any other kind of union.

With this same spiritual and pastoral attitude your work both in adjudicating and in contributing to permanent formation assists and promotes the *opus veritatis*. When by way of your service the Church claims to speak the truth of marriage in a particular case, for the good of the faithful, she

always takes into consideration that many who live in an objective state of error, whether by free choice or other unhappy life circumstance,² nonetheless continue to be recipients of the merciful love of Christ and hence of the Church herself.

The family, founded upon an indissoluble, unitive and procreative marriage, belongs to the “dream” of God and that of the Church, for the salvation of humanity.³ In the words of Blessed Paul VI, the Church has always turned “a special gaze, full of concern and love, upon the family and its problems. By way of marriage and the family, God has in his wisdom united two of the greatest human realities: the mission of passing on the life and the mutual and legitimate love between one man and one woman, through which they are both called to fulfillment in the reciprocal gift of self that is not only physical but especially spiritual. Or better put: God desired to make spouses participants in his love, in the personal love that God has for each of them and through which he calls them to help each other and give of themselves to one another so as to reach the fullness of their personal lives; and of the love that God bears for humanity and all its children, through which God desires the multiplication of human beings that they, too, may be rendered participants in his life and his eternal happiness.”⁴

The family and the Church, on different levels, help to accompany mankind toward the end of its existence. They certainly do so in the teachings they pass on, but also with the very nature of each as a community of life and love. Indeed, if the family can rightly be called “domestic church”, the Church can rightly be named the family of God. Therefore, “‘the family spirit’ is a constitutional charter for the Church: this is how Christianity must appear, and this is how it must be. It is written in bold characters: ‘you who were far off’ — St Paul says — ‘[...] are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God’ (Eph 2:17, 19). The Church is and must be the family of God.”⁵

Precisely because she is mother and teacher, the Church knows that among Christians there are those who are of strong faith, formed out of love and reinforced by good catechesis and nourished by prayer and a sacramental life, while others are of weak faith, overlooked and unformed, poorly educated or simply forgotten.

It is worth clearly reiterating that the essential component of marital consent is not the quality of one’s faith, which according to unchanging doctrine can be undermined only on the plane of the natural (cf. CIC c. 1055 §§ 1,2). Indeed, the *habitus fidei* is infused at the moment of Baptism and continues to have a mysterious influence in the soul, even when faith has not been developed and psychologically speaking seems to be absent. It is not uncommon that couples are led to true marriage by the *instinctus naturae* and at the moment of its celebration they have a limited awareness of the fullness of God’s plan. Only later in the life of the family do they come to discover all that God, the Creator and Redeemer, has established for them. A lack of formation in the faith and error with respect to the unity, indissolubility and sacramental dignity of marriage invalidate marital consent only if they influence the person’s will (cf. CIC c. 1099). It is for this

reason that errors regarding the sacramentality of marriage must be evaluated very attentively.

The Church, thus, with a renewed sense of responsibility continues to propound marriage in its essential elements — offspring, the good of the spouses, unity, indissolubility and sacramentality⁶ — not as an ideal meant only for the few, notwithstanding modern models fixated on the ephemeral and the passing, but rather as a reality that in Christ's grace can be lived out by all baptized faithful. Therefore, *a fortiori*, pastoral urgency involving all Church structures is leading us toward a shared intention to provide adequate preparation for marriage in a kind of new catechumanate — I emphasize this: a kind of new catechumanate — strongly hoped for by various Synod Fathers.⁷

Dear brothers, the time in which we live is a challenging one both for families and for us shepherds called to accompany them. With this awareness I bid you good work for the new year that the Lord has given us. I assure you of my prayers and I am counting on yours. May Our Lady and St Joseph lead the Church to grow in the spirit of the family and help families to feel ever more a living and active part of the People of God. Thank you.

Notes

[1] Pius XII, *Address to the Roman Rota*, 1 October 1940: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 October 1940, p. 1.

[2] G.B. Montini, *Pastoral Letter to the Archdiocese of Milan for the Beginning of Lent* 1960. "Perhaps this scourge has an extremely generic name, yet in this tragically real case it is indeed *egoism*. If egoism governs the domain of human love, namely the family, it demoralizes it, saddens it and dissolves it. The art of loving is not as easy as is commonly believed. To teach it, instinct alone does not suffice; much less passion nor even pleasure."

[3] Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Casti connubii*, 31 December 1930: AAS 22(1930), 541.

[4] Paul VI, *Address to participants in the 13th National Congress of the Centro Italiano Femminile*, 12 February 1966: AAS 58 (1966), 219. St John Paul II in his *Letter to Families* states that the family is "the first and most important" way of the Church (*Gratissimam sane*, 2 February 1994: AAS 86 [1994], 868).

[5] *General Audience Catechesis*, 7 October 2015.

[6] Cf. Augustinus, *De bono coniugali*, 24, 32; *De Genesi ad litteram*, 9, 7, 12.

[7] "We think this preparation for marriage will be facilitated if the formation of the family is

presented to the youth and if comprised of those intent on establishing their own hearth and home as a vocation, as a mission, as a great duty, which endows life with a noble purpose and fills it with its gifts and virtues. This presentation neither deforms nor exaggerates reality” (G.B. Montini, *Pastoral Letter to the Archdiocese of Milan*, op. cit.).