



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE COURSE ON THE MARRIAGE PROCESS

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 25 February 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers,

I am happy to meet you at the end of the formation course for parish priests on the new matrimonial process, promoted by the Roman Rota. I thank the Dean and the Pro-Dean for their commitment to these formation courses. The discussions and proposals put forth at the Synod of Bishops on the theme “Marriage and Family” were received and integrated in an organic way into the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and translated into legal provisions contained in two specific documents: the Motu Proprio *Mitis iudex* and the Motu Proprio *Misericors Iesus*. It is good that through these study initiatives you parish priests can closely examine this subject, because it will be mostly you who will be applying it in a concrete way in your daily contact with families.

In most cases you are the first people to be approached by young people desiring to form a new family and marry in the Sacrament of Matrimony. And it is again you to whom married couples turn in crisis as a result of serious relationship problems, with a need to rekindle their faith and rediscover the grace of the Sacrament. In some cases, they ask for information on beginning a process of nullity. No one better than you knows and is in touch with the reality of the social fabric of the territory, and experiences the various complexities: unions celebrated in Christ, *de facto* unions, civil unions, failed unions, happy and unhappy families and young people. With each person and in each situation, you are called to be travelling companions who can offer *witness* and *support*.

May your primary concern be *to bear witness* to the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the primordial good of the family, vital cell of the Church and of Society, by announcing that marriage

between a man and a woman is a symbol of the spousal union between Christ and the Church. Such witness is put into practice concretely when you prepare engaged couples for marriage, making them aware of the profound meaning of the step which they are about to take, and when you journey with young couples with attentiveness, helping them experience the divine strength and the beauty of their marriage through light and shadow, through joyful and difficult times. But I ask myself, how many of these young people who attend pre-marriage courses understand what “matrimony” means, the symbol of Christ’s union with the Church? “Yes, yes” — they say ‘yes’, but do they understand this? Do they believe this? I am convinced that there is a need for a true catechumenate for the Sacrament of Matrimony, not just two or three meetings and then proceed.

Never fail to remind Christian newlyweds that in the Sacrament of Matrimony, God is reflected in them, so to speak, and His image and the irrevocable nature of His love are imprinted. In fact, marriage is God’s icon, created for us by He who is the perfect communion of the three Persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. May the love of the Triune God, and the love between Christ and his Bride the Church be the focus of marriage catechesis and evangelization: through planned or spontaneous personal or community encounters. Never tire of showing everyone, especially newlyweds, this “*great mystery*” (Eph 5:32)

While offering your witness, may you take care to *strengthen* those who have come to realize that their union is not a true sacramental matrimony and want to change this situation. In this delicate and critical phase, ensure that your faithful see you, not so much as experts of bureaucratic procedures or legal norms, but rather, as brothers ready to be understanding listeners.

At the same time, reach out in the Gospel way by meeting and welcoming young people who prefer to live together without being married. On the spiritual and moral level, they are among the poor and the little ones, towards whom the Church, following in the footsteps of her Master and Lord, seeks to be a mother who does not abandon but draws near and takes care of them. These people are also loved by the heart of Christ. Look to them with compassion and tenderness. Since this care for the least comes from the Gospel, it is an essential part of your ministry in promoting and safeguarding the Sacrament of Marriage. The parish, in fact, is by antonomasia the *salus animarum*. Thus, taught Blessed Paul VI: “The parish is the presence of Christ in the fullness of its saving function[...], it is the home of the Gospel, the house of truth, the school of our Lord” (*Discourse in the parish church of Gran Madre di Dio in Rome, 8 March 1964: Insegnamenti II* [1964], 1077).

Dear brothers, speaking recently to the Roman Rota, I recommended the implementation of a true catechumenate of future spouses including all the steps of the sacramental path: time of preparation for the marriage, its celebration and the years immediately thereafter. This catechumenate is principally entrusted to you parish priests, indispensable collaborators of the Bishops. I encourage you to implement it despite any difficulties you may encounter. And I believe the greatest hindrance is to view or experience marriage as a social construct — “we must

comport with this social construct” — and not as a true sacrament which requires a very lengthy preparation.

I thank you for your commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel of the Family. May the Holy Spirit help you become ministers of peace and consolation in the midst of God’s faithful holy people, especially to the most fragile and those most in need of your pastoral care. As I ask you to pray for me, I bestow my heartfelt blessing on each of you and your parish communities. Thank you.