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The Pope addresses the Tribunal of the Roman Rota at the inauguration of the Judicial Year

This morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father received in audience the prelate auditors, officials, lawyers and collaborators of the Roman Rota on the occasion of the solemn inauguration of the Judicial Year.

After greetings from the dean, Msgr. Pio Vito Pinto, the Pope delivered the following address to those present:

Today I would like to return to the theme of the relationship between faith and marriage, in particular on the prospects of faith inherent in the human and cultural context in which the matrimonial institution is formed. St. John Paul II showed, based on the teaching of the Sacred Scripture, "how deeply related are the knowledge conferred by faith and the knowledge conferred by reason. ... What is distinctive in the biblical text is the conviction that there is a profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith" (*Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 16). Therefore, the farther one drifts from the perspective of faith, the more "the human being runs the risk of failure and ends up in the condition of 'the fool'". For the Bible, in this foolishness, a threat to life is inherent. "The fool thinks that he knows many things, but really he is incapable of fixing his gaze on the things that truly matter. Therefore he can neither order his mind nor assume a correct attitude to himself or to the world around him. And so when he claims that 'God does not exist', he shows with absolute clarity just how deficient his knowledge is and just how far he is from the full truth of things, their origin and their destiny".

For his part, Pope Benedict XVI, in his final address to you, recalled that "It is only in opening oneself to God's truth ... that it is possible to understand and achieve in the concrete reality of both conjugal and family life the truth of men and women as his children, regenerated by Baptism. ... The rejection of the divine proposal, in fact, leads to a profound imbalance in all human relations ... including matrimonial relations" (26 January 2013). It is more necessary than ever to delve in to the relationship between love and truth. "Love requires truth. Only to the extent that love is grounded in truth can it endure over time, can it transcend the passing moment and be sufficiently solid to sustain a shared journey. If love is not tied to truth, it falls prey to fickle emotions and cannot stand the test of time. True love, on the other hand, unifies all the elements of our person and becomes a new light pointing the way to a great and fulfilled life. Without truth, love is incapable of establishing a firm bond; it cannot liberate our isolated ego or redeem it from the fleeting moment in order to create life and bear fruit".

I cannot conceal from you that a widespread mentality tends to obscure access to eternal truths. A mentality that involves, often in a vast and capillary fashion, the attitudes and behaviour of Christians themselves, whose faith is weakened and loses the originality of its interpretative and working criteria for personal, family and social existence. Such a context, lacking in religious values and faith, cannot but condition matrimonial consent. The experience of faith of those who require Christian marriage are very diverse. Some participate actively in the life of the parish; others encounter it for the first time; others have an intense life of prayer; and others are, instead, guided by a more generic religious feeling; at times they are people far from faith or lacking in faith.

Faced with this situation, it is necessary to find valid remedies. I indicate a first remedy in the formation of the young through an adequate process of preparation aimed at rediscovering marriage and the family according to God's plan. It means helping future spouses to grasp and savour the grace, beauty and joy of true love, saved and redeemed by Jesus. The Christian community to which engaged couples turn is called to announce cordially the Gospel to these people, so that their experience of love may become a sacrament, an effective sign of salvation. In this circumstance, the redeeming mission of Jesus reaches man and women in the concrete domain of their love life. This moment becomes, for all the community, an extraordinary occasion for mission. Today more than ever, this preparation is presented as a real opportunity for the evangelisation of adults and, often, for those who have drifted away. Indeed, there are many young people for whom the proximity of marriage constitutes the opportunity to encounter anew the faith long relegated to the margins of their lives; moreover, they are at a particular moment in their lives, often characterised by the willingness to review and change the orientation of their existence. It may be, therefore, a favourable time to renew their encounter with the figure of Jesus Christ, with the message of the Gospel and the doctrine of the Church.

Therefore, workers and entities engaged in family pastoral care must be inspired by a strong concern to make paths for preparation for the sacrament of marriage increasingly effective, not only for human growth but above all for the faith of engaged couples. A fundamental aim of these meetings is that of helping engaged couples to achieve a gradual integration into the mystery of Christ, in the Church and with the Church. This requires a gradual maturation in faith, through the announcement of the Word of God, joining and generously following Christ. The objective of this preparation thus consists in helping engaged couples to know and experience the reality of the marriage they intend to celebrate, so that they can do so not only in a valid and legitimate way, but also fruitfully, and so that they may be available to make this celebration a phase in their journey of faith. To achieve all this, there is a need for people with specific skill, suitably prepared for this service, in a timely synergy between priests and couples.

In this spirit, I must repeat the need for a "new catechumenate" in preparation for marriage. Welcoming the hopes expressed by the Fathers during the last Ordinary Synod, it is urgent to implement practically what was proposed in *Familiaris Consortio* (No. 66), that is, just as for the baptism of adults the catechumenate is part of the sacramental process, also the preparation for marriage should become an integral part of all the sacramental procedure of marriage, as an antidote that prevents the proliferation of null or inconsistent marriage celebrations.

A second remedy is that of helping newly-weds to follow the path of faith and in the Church also after the celebration of marriage. It is necessary to identify, with courage and creativity, a project of formation for young couples, with initiatives aimed at a growing awareness of the sacrament received. This involves encouraging them to consider the various aspects of their daily life as a couple, which is a sign and instrument of God's love, incarnate in the story of man. Let me give two examples. First and foremost, the love in which the new family lives has its roots and ultimate wellspring in the mystery of the Trinity, for which it bears this seal despite the hardships and poverty it must be measured against in daily life. Another example: the love story of the Christian couple is part of sacred history, as God abides in it, and because God never fails in the commitment He makes with couples on their wedding day. Indeed, He "remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself".

The Christian community is called to welcome, accompany and help young couples, offering them suitable opportunities and tools – starting with participation in Sunday Mass – to care for their spiritual life both within family life and in the realm of pastoral planning in the parish or in groups. Often young couples are left to their own devices, perhaps for the simple fact of being seen less in the parish. This happens in particular with the birth of children. But it is precisely in those first moments of family life that there is a need to guarantee greater closeness and strong spiritual support, also in the work of educating their children, for whom they are the first

witnesses and bearers of the gift of faith. In the path of the human and spiritual growth of newly-weds, it is to be hope that there are groups of reference in which they are able to undertake a process of continuing formation: by listening to the Word, discussion on themes relating to family life, prayer and fraternal sharing.

These two remedies that I have indicated are aimed at favouring a suitable context of faith in which to celebrate and live marriage. Such a crucial aspect for the solidity and truth of the marriage sacrament requires parish priests to be increasingly aware of the delicate task entrusted to them in managing the sacramental path of future spouses, making the synergy between *foedus* and *fides* more intelligible and real in them. This means passing from a strictly legal and formal vision in the preparation of future spouses, to an *ab initio* sacramental foundation, that is, starting from the process towards the fullness of their *foedus*-consent elevated by Christ to sacrament. This will demand a generous contribution from adult Christians, men and women, who assist the priest in his family pastoral ministry to construct the “masterpiece of society, the family, the man and women who love each other ... God’s luminous plan” (homily at Vespers on the eve of the opening of the Ordinary Synod, 3 October 2015).

May the Holy Spirit, Who always guides the holy People of God in everything, assist and support those, priests and laypeople, who are and will be occupied in this field, so that they never lose the zeal and courage to work for the beauty of Christian families, despite the ruinous pitfalls of the dominant culture of the ephemeral and the provisional.

Dear brothers, as I have said to you many times, it takes great courage to marry in the times in which we live. And those who have the strength and the joy to take this important step must feel the affection and the concrete closeness of the Church next to them. With this hope, I renew my wishes for your good work in this new year that the Lord gives us. I assure you of my prayer and also count on yours, and I impart to you my heartfelt apostolic blessing.
