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Francis to the participants in the formation course for priests on the new matrimonial process: “You are called by every person and every situation to be travelling companions”

This morning in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father received in audience the participants in the Formation Course for the Pastors on the new process for the declaration of nullity of marriage, organised by the Tribunal of the Roman Rota in the Palace of the Chancellery and taking place from 22 to 25 February.

In the Pope's address, he noted that everything that had been discussed and proposed at the Synod of Bishops on the theme of "Marriage and the Family" has been integrated into the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and translated into legal provisions contained in two documents: the Motu Proprio *Mitis iudex* and the Motu Proprio *Misericors Jesus*. "It is good", he observed, "that you, parish priests, through these initiatives of study, can explore this issue further, because it is you, above all, who apply it in a concrete way in your daily contact with families".

"In the majority of cases, you are the first interlocutors for the young people who want to form a new family and marry in the Sacrament of marriage", he continued. "And you also receive those couples who, due to serious problems in their relationship, find themselves in crisis, and need to revive their faith and rediscover the grace of the Sacrament; and in some cases, who ask for instructions for initiating a process of nullity. No-one knows better than you, or is more in touch with, the reality of the social fabric in the territory, or experiences its varied complexity as you do: marriages celebrated in Christ, *de facto* unions, civil unions, failed unions, happy and unhappy families and young people. You are called by every person and every situation to be travelling companions, to witness and to support".

"May your first concern be to bear witness to the grace of the Sacrament of marriage and the primordial good of the family, the vital cell of the Church and society, by announcing that marriage between a man and a woman is a sign of the nuptial relationship between Christ and His Church", said the Pope to the parish priests. "This testimony is put into practice when you prepare marriage partners for marriage, making them aware of the profound importance of the step they are about to take, and when you accompany young couples with solicitude, helping them to live the highlights and shadows, the moments of joy and those of hardship, the divine strength and the beauty of their marriage".

Francis emphasised that parish priests should always remind Christian spouses that in the Sacrament of Matrimony God is, as it were, reflected in them, “imprinting His image and the indelible character of His love” ... The love of the Triune God and the love between Christ and the Church, His bride, must be at the centre of catechesis and matrimonial evangelisation: in personal or community meetings, planned or spontaneous, do not tire of showing everyone, especially married couples, this ‘great mystery’. As you offer this testimony, be sure also to support those who have realised that their marriage is not a truly sacramental marriage, and want to come out of the situation. In this delicate and necessary task, may your faithful see you not only as experts of bureaucratic acts or legal norms, but as brothers who listen and understand them”.

“At the same time, be neighbours in the style proper to the Gospel, in encounter and welcome, to those young people who prefer to cohabit without getting married”, he said, “because on a spiritual and moral level they are among the poorest and the least, for whom the Church, following in the footsteps of her Master and Lord, wishes to be a mother who does not abandon them, but rather who approaches and cares for them. Christ also loves these people with all His heart. Look upon them with tenderness and compassion. This care for the least, precisely because it emanates from the Gospel, is an essential part of your task of promoting and defending the sacrament of marriage”.

Finally, the Holy Father recalled that in his recent address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota he had recommended the establishment of a true catechumenate of newly-weds, including all stages of the sacramental journey: the period of preparation for marriage, its celebration and the years immediately afterwards. “This catechumenate is entrusted to you, pastors, indispensable collaborators of the bishops”, he emphasised. “I encourage you to put this into practice, despite the difficulties that may arise”.

The Pope concluded by thanking those present for their commitment to proclaiming the Gospel of the family and asked that the Holy Spirit help them be “ministers of peace and comfort in the midst of the faithful saints of God, especially the most vulnerable and needy”.
