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Alle ore 16.30 di oggi, alla presenza del Santo Padre, si tiene nell'Aula del Sinodo in Vaticano la seconda Congregazione generale del Sinodo straordinario sulla famiglia. Con questa Congregazione inizia il dibattito generale, che segue un ordine tematico in corrispondenza con le parti e i capitoli dell'*Instrumentum laboris*.

La sessione tematica di oggi: *Il disegno di Dio su matrimonio e famiglia* (I parte, cap. 1), e *Conoscenza e ricezione della Sacra Scrittura e dei documenti della Chiesa su matrimonio e famiglia* (I parte, cap. 2), si è aperta con una breve presentazione del Presidente delegato di turno, il Card. André Vingt-Trois, Arcivescovo di Paris (Francia), che ha introdotto la testimonianza dei coniugi Romano e Mavis Pirola, Direttori del *Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council* (Australia), presenti al sinodo come Uditori. Ne riportiamo di seguito i testi:

Introduzione del Presidente delegato, Card. André Vingt-Trois

Cette Deuxième Congrégation Générale sera consacrée à la communication de l'Évangile dans la famille aujourd'hui, un sujet présenté dans la première partie de l'*Instrumentum laboris*. Ce matin nous concentrerons notre attention et nos débats sur les chapitres 1 et 2 qui concernent plus particulièrement 8 thèmes bien définis.

Tout d'abord, dans le cadre du Chapitre 1 : *Le dessein de Dieu sur le mariage et la famille* (1-7), un premier thème traite de *La famille à la lumière des données bibliques* (1-3). Cela permet ainsi de relire les données de la Révélation sur la famille, depuis la Genèse jusqu'à son perfectionnement dans l'enseignement du Christ qui offre comme fondement de l'amour sposal l'irrévocable fidélité divine et la participation à l'œuvre créatrice de Dieu.

Un deuxième thème nous est donné en considérant *La famille dans les documents de l'Église* (4-7). Au cours des siècles, l'Église n'a pas manqué d'offrir son enseignement constant sur le mariage et la famille. Plus proches de nous, les Papes Paul VI, Jean-Paul II, Benoît XVI ont rappelé les lignes fondamentales d'une pastorale de la famille et de la présence de la famille dans la société. Encore tout récemment, Sa Sainteté le Pape François a également abordé le lien entre la famille et la foi dans son Encyclique *Lumen Fidei*.

Le chapitre 2 : *Connaissance et réception de l'Écriture Sainte et des documents de l'Église sur le mariage et la famille*, nous offre les six thèmes suivants. Tout d'abord *La connaissance de la Bible sur la famille* (9-10) et celle *des documents du Magistère* (11) qui font le pendant de ce qui est présenté au chapitre 1 et viennent le compléter en peignant fidèlement la situation au sein du peuple de Dieu. Celle-ci souligne le rôle et la responsabilité des pasteurs d'âmes qui exigent d'eux une meilleure préparation (12). En effet, même quand l'enseignement de l'Église sur le mariage et la famille est connu, beaucoup de chrétiens manifestent des difficultés à l'accepter intégralement (13). Il faut donc des pasteurs capables de les introduire aux vérités de la foi concernant la famille, surtout pour qu'ils puissent en apprécier la profonde valeur humaine et existentielle (14) en dépit des difficultés dans l'accueil de cet enseignement en raison notamment de la fragilité des rapports interpersonnels et d'une culture ambiante qui refuse des choix définitifs, conditionnée par la précarité et par le provisoire (15-16). Dans ce contexte, *encourager une meilleure connaissance du Magistère est une condition essentielle à la compréhension et à l'acceptation des enseignements de l'Église sur le mariage et la famille* (17-19).

Conscients de l'importance de ce défi, écoutons maintenant le témoignage des époux Ron et Mavis Pirola, Co-Directeurs du *Conseil catholique d'Australie pour le mariage et la famille*, qui nous viennent de ce grand continent où se côtoient des cultures si variées, mais toutes attentives à la voix de l'Esprit Saint, sous la protection duquel il est placé.

[03007-03.01] [Texte original: Français]

Testimonianza dei coniugi Ron (Romano) e Mavis Pirola (Sydney, Australia)

Fifty-seven years ago, I looked across a room and saw a beautiful young woman. We came to know each other over time and eventually took the huge step of committing ourselves to each other in marriage. We soon found that living our new life together was extraordinarily complex. Like all marriages, we have had wonderful times together and also times of anger, frustration and tears and the nagging fear of a failed marriage. Yet here we are, 55 years married and still in love. It certainly is a mystery.

That attraction that we first felt and the continued bonding force between us was basically sexual. The little things we did for each other, the telephone calls and love notes, the way we planned our day around each other and the things we shared were outward expressions of our longing to be intimate with each other.

As each of our four children arrived, it was an exhilarating joy for which we still thank the Lord daily. Of course, the complexities of parenting had great rewards and challenges. There were nights when we would lie awake wondering where we had gone wrong.

Our faith in Jesus was important to us. We went to Mass together and looked to the Church for guidance. Occasionally we looked at Church documents but they seemed to be from another planet with difficult language and not terribly relevant to our own experiences.

In our life's journey together, we were primarily influenced through involvement with other married couples and some priests, mainly in lay spirituality movements, particularly Équipes Notre Dame and Worldwide Marriage Encounter.² The process was one of prayerful listening to each others' stories and of being accepted and affirmed in the context of Church teaching. There was not much discussion about natural law but for us they were examples of what Pope John Paul would later refer to as one of the Church's major resources for evangelization.³

Gradually we came to see that the only feature that distinguishes our sacramental relationship from that of any other good Christ-centred relationship is sexual intimacy and that marriage is a sexual sacrament with its fullest expression in sexual intercourse. We believe that until married couples come to reverence sexual union as an essential part of their spirituality it is extremely hard to appreciate the beauty of teachings such as those of *Humanae Vitae*. We need new ways and relatable language to touch peoples' hearts.

As the *Instrumentum laboris* suggests, the domestic church has much to offer the wider Church in its evangelizing role.⁴ For example, the Church constantly faces the tension of upholding the truth while expressing compassion and mercy. Families face this tension all the time.

Take homosexuality as an example. Friends of ours were planning their Christmas family gathering when their gay son said he wanted to bring his partner home too. They fully believed in the Church's teachings and they knew their grandchildren would see them welcome the son and his partner into the family. Their response could be summed up in three words, 'He is our son'.

What a model of evangelization for parishes as they respond to similar situations in their neighbourhood! It is a practical example of what the *Instrumentum laboris* says concerning the Church's teaching role and its main mission to let the world know of God's love.⁵

In our experience, families, the domestic churches, are often the natural models of the open doors for churches of which *Gaudium Evangelii* speaks.⁶

A divorced friend of ours says that sometimes she doesn't feel fully accepted in her parish. However, she turns up to Mass regularly and uncomplainingly with her children. For the rest of her parish she should be a model of courage and commitment in the face of adversity. From people like her we learn to recognize that we all carry an element of brokenness in our lives. Appreciating our own brokenness helps enormously to reduce our tendency to be judgemental of others which is such a block for evangelisation.

We know an elderly widow who lives with her only son. He is in his forties and has Down syndrome and schizophrenia. She cares for him inspiring and her only expressed fear is who will care for him when she is no longer able.

Our lives are touched by many such families. These families have a basic understanding of what the Church teaches. They could always benefit from better teaching and programs. However, more than anything they need to be accompanied on their journey, welcomed, have their stories listened to, and, above all, affirmed.⁷

The *Instrumentum laboris* notes that the beauty of human love mirrors the divine love as recorded in biblical tradition in the prophets. But their family lives were chaotic and full of messy dramas. Yes, family life is 'messy'. But so is parish, which is the 'family of families'.

The *Instrumentum laboris* questions how 'the clergy [could] be better prepared ... in ... presenting the documents of the Church on marriage and the family'.⁸ Again, one way could be by learning from the domestic church. As Pope Benedict XVI said, 'This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognized as "co-responsible", for the Church's being and action'.⁹ That would also require a major attitudinal change for laity.

We have eight wonderful, unique grandchildren. We pray for them by name daily because daily they are exposed to the distorted messages of modern society, even as they walk down the street to school such messages are on billboards or appear on their smartphones.

A high respect for authority, parental, religious or secular, has long gone. So their parents learn to enter into the lives of their children, to share their values and hopes for them and also to learn from them in turn. This process of entering into the lives of our other persons and learning from them as well as sharing with them is at the heart of evangelization. As Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 'The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them.'¹⁰ That has certainly been our experience.

In fact, we resonate with the suggestion of one of our daughters regarding the development of what she calls a nuptial paradigm¹¹ for Christian spirituality, one that applies to all people, whether single, celibate or married but which would make matrimony the starting point for understanding mission. It would have a solid biblical and anthropological basis and would highlight the vocational instinct for generativity and intimacy experienced by each person. It would remind us that each of us is created for relationship¹² and that baptism in Christ means belonging to his Body, leading us towards an eternity with God who is a Trinitarian communion of love.

1 It amazes us that in any pharmacy we can buy tablets in a packet that contains a detailed pamphlet that explains complex scientific aspects of the medicine in simple lay language and which will withstand possible litigation in court. There is an urgent need for a comparable approach to the documents of the Magisterium. A practical example of how this might be done was given by Prof Jane Adolphe at the XXI General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (PCF), Oct 23-25, 2013. The PCF's Charter of the Rights of the Family is a beautiful Church document, complete with extensive Church references. Hence, it is generally viewed as a 'Church document' and rarely quoted in secular circles. Prof Adolph has re-drafted the document, making the same points with entirely secular references, thus making it a document likely to be quoted by secular organizations such as the UN and therefore much more likely to be read in the public domain.

2 We were deeply influenced also by contact with, or involvement in, other lay spirituality organizations and movements such as Charismatic Renewal, the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Centre, the Antioch Youth Movement and Focolare.³ Pope John Paul II, '*the family is one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelisation and not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care*', 1999, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 46.4 *Instrumentum laboris*, III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Vatican City, 2014. No.4. '... the Church, in order to fully understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way.'⁵ *Instrumentum laboris*, III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Vatican City, 2014. Preface, para 2. '[The Synod] is called to reflect on the path to follow to communicate to everyone the truth about conjugal love and the family and respond to its many challenges (cf. EG, 66). The family is an inexhaustible resource and font of life in the Church's pastoral activity. Therefore, the primary task of the Church is to proclaim the beauty of the vocation to love which holds great potential for society and the Church.'⁶ Pope Francis, 2013, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 46.7 When people are affirmed for the good they do, they do it better. Hence the value of St Pope John Paul II's statement, 'Family, become what you are!' (FC, 17).⁸ *Instrumentum laboris*, III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Vatican City, 2014. No.12. 'that the clergy be better prepared and exercise a sense of responsibility in explaining the Word of God and presenting the documents of the Church on marriage and the family.'⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, 26 May 2009, Address at Rome Diocese pastoral convention on the theme "Church Membership and Pastoral Co-responsibility", as reported in Zenit, Vatican City, 4 June 2009.¹⁰ Pope Paul VI, 1975, EN 71.¹¹ Teresa Pirola, '*Family life in a post-conciliar pastoral agenda*', Aust eJournal of Theology, 2012, 19:2.¹² St Pope John Paul II, Wednesday General Audience, '*The nuptial meaning of the body*', 8 Jan 1980.

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