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To the Pontifical St. John Paul II Institute: interpreting, for our time, the truth and the beauty of God's creative design

“The far-sighted intuition of St. John Paul II, who greatly desired the institution of this academic institution, can be better recognised and appreciated today in its fruitfulness and current relevance. His wise discernment of the signs of the times vigorously restored to the attention of the Church, and to human society itself, the depth and delicate nature of the bonds that are generated from the conjugal alliance between man and woman”, said Pope Francis this morning, as he received in the Clementine Hall the academic community of the Pontifical “John Paul II” Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. Before the four hundred people present in the Clementine Hall, the Pope emphasised that the development of the Institute in all five continents confirms the validity and meaning of the “Catholic” form of its programme. “The vitality of this project, which has generated such a high-profile institution, encourages the development of further initiatives for discussion and exchange with all academic institutions, even those belonging to different religious and cultural areas, that are engaged nowadays in reflecting on this very delicate human frontier”.

“At the current moment, conjugal and family bonds are challenged in many ways. The affirmation of a culture that exalts narcissistic individualism, a concept of freedom detached from responsibility for the other, the growth of indifference with regard to the common good, the imposition of ideologies that directly attack the family project, and the growth of the poverty that threatens the future of many families, are all reasons for the crisis of the contemporary family. Then, there are open questions on the development of new technologies, which make possible practices that are at times contrary to the true dignity of human life. ... I exhort you to explore courageously these new and delicate implications with all the necessary rigour, without giving in to ‘the temptation to embellish, to add fragrance, to adjust them to some degree and domesticate them’”.

On the other hand, “the uncertainty and disorientation that affect the fundamental affections of the person and of life destabilise all bonds, family and social, causing ‘I’ always to prevail over ‘we’, the individual over society. It is an outcome that contradicts the plan of God, Who entrusted the world and history to the alliance of man and woman. This alliance, by its very nature, implies cooperation and respect, generous dedication and shared responsibility, and the capacity for recognising difference as a wealth and as a promise, not as a reason for subjugation and abuse”.

The Pope went on to affirm that “recognition of the dignity of man and woman leads to a just appreciation of their

mutual relationship. ... It is impossible to deny the contribution of modern culture to the rediscovery of the dignity of sexual difference. ... Therefore, it is also very disconcerting to observe that this culture ... has a tendency to cancel out difference instead of resolving the problems that mortify it. ... The family is the indispensable bosom of the initiation of the creative alliance between man and woman. This bond, sustained by the grace of God the Creator and Saviour, is destined to be realised in the many aspects of their relationship, which are reflected in the different community and social bonds. The profound correlation between family figures and the social forms of this alliance – in religion and in ethics, in work, in the economy, in politics, in the care for life and in the relationship between generations – is by now globally evident”.

“The Church sees in the family the icon of God’s alliance with the entire human family. ... The charity of the Church therefore endeavours to develop, at doctrinal and pastoral level, our capacity to read and interpret, for our time, the truth and the beauty of God’s creative design. The irradiation of this divine plan ... requires a special intelligence of love, and also strong evangelical dedication, inspired by great compassion and mercy for the vulnerability and fallibility of love between human beings”.

“It is necessary to apply ourselves with greater enthusiasm to the redemption – I would say almost the rehabilitation – of this extraordinary ‘invention’ of divine creation. This redemption must be taken seriously, in both a doctrinal and a practical sense. The dynamics of the relationship between God, man and woman, and their children, are the golden keys to understanding the world and history, with all they contain. And finally, to understand something profound that is found in the love of God Himself. ... We are certainly well aware of the fact that we bear this treasure too in ‘jars of clay’. Grace exists, just like sin. Let us learn, therefore, not to resign ourselves to human failure, but rather to support the redemption of the creative plan at all cost. Indeed, it is right to recognise that ‘at times we have proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealisation, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite”’, added the Pope, quoting from his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

He also mentioned that the Synod meetings of bishops from all over the world, “*cum Petro et sub Petro*, have unanimously expressed the need to widen the Church’s understanding and care for this mystery of human love in which the path is opened for God’s love for all. The apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* treasures this and urges the entire people of God to make more visible and effective the family dimension of the Church. ... The pastoral theme nowadays is not only that of the distance of many from the ideal and from the practice of the Christian truth of marriage and the family; more decisive still is the theme of the Church’s closeness: closeness to the new generations of married couples, so that the blessing of their union may increasingly convince and accompany them, and closeness to situations of human weakness, so that grace may redeem, reanimate and heal them. The indissoluble bond of the Church with her children is the most transparent sign of the faithful and merciful love of God”.

“The new horizon of this task must certainly involve your Institute in an entirely special way; it is called to support the necessary openness of the intelligence of faith in the service of the pastoral care of the Successor of Peter”, he remarked. “Theology and pastoral ministry go hand in hand. A theological doctrine that does not allow itself to be guided and formed by the evangelising impulse and the pastoral care of the Church is as unthinkable as a pastoral ministry that does not cherish the revelation and her tradition with a view to a greater intelligence and transmission of the faith”. This task “demands to be rooted in the joy of the faith and the humility of a joyful service to the Church: the Church that exists, not a Church considered in its own image and semblance. The living Church in which we live, the beautiful Church to which we belong, the Church of the only Lord and the only Spirit to which we deliver ourselves as ‘unworthy servants’ who offer their best gifts”.
