



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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The Pope meets the bishops attending the course on the new marriage nullity procedures, organised by the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota

This afternoon Pope Francis visited the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota, where he met with the participants in the course on the new procedures for the declaration of nullity of marriage, held from 17 to 19 November. In his address to the prelates, the Holy Father emphasised that their presence on the course underlines how bishops, although constituted by virtue of their ordination as *masters of the faith*, need to learn continually so as to comprehend the needs and the concerns of humanity today, and to provide answers in the Word of God and in the truths of the faith, studied and understood in ever greater depth.

“The exercise of the *munus docendi* is intimately linked with *sanctificandi* and *regendi*. These three functions express the pastoral ministry of the bishop, based in the will of Christ, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit and aimed at implementing Jesus’ message. The inculturation of the Gospel is based precisely on this principle, which unites faithfulness to the evangelical proclamation with its comprehension and translation over time”.

“Blessed Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, urged evangelisation not in a superficial way, but by entering into the practical reality of situations and people”, he continued. “Indeed, attention to people is the underlying theological and ecclesiological reason for this training course. Spiritual health, the *salus animarum* of the people entrusted to us, constitutes the objective of every form of pastoral action. In the first epistle of Peter we find a fundamental point of reference for episcopal office: ‘Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock’. This exhortation illuminates the entire mission of the bishop, presenting spiritual power as a service for the salvation of men. From this perspective, it is necessary to eliminate decisively any obstacle of a worldly nature that makes it difficult for a large number of faithful to have access to the ecclesiastical Tribunals. Issues of an economic or organisational type cannot constitute an obstacle for the canonical verification of the validity of a marriage. With a view to a healthy relationship between justice and charity, the law of the Church cannot disregard the fundamental principle of the *salus animarum*. Therefore, the ecclesiastical tribunals are called to be a tangible expression of a diaconal service of law, with regard to this primary aim. This is appropriately placed as the final word of the Code of Canon Law, as it is above it as the supreme law and a value that exceeds the law itself, thus indicating the horizon of mercy”.

“From this perspective, the Church always journeys, like a mother who accepts and loves, following the example

of Jesus, the Good Samaritan. The Church of the Incarnate Word is incarnate in the sorrowful and painful histories of the people, and stoops to the poor and those who are far from the ecclesial community, or who consider themselves outside it as a result of the failure of their marriage. However, they are and remain incorporating in Christ by virtue of their Baptism. Therefore, we have the grave responsibility of exercising the *munus*, received by Jesus the Divine Pastor, physician and judge of souls, never considering them extraneous to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. We are called not to exclude them from our pastoral concern, but rather to dedicate ourselves to them and to their irregular and painful situation with the greatest care and charity”.

Francis went on to thank the dean of the Roman Rota Msgr. Pio Vito Pinto for organising the course and the speakers for their important theological, juridical and pastoral contributions to an initiative that will help the bishops who have participated to identify the most suitable approach to the not always straightforward problems posed by the pastoral ministry of marriage in their respective countries and dioceses. “You will return to your dioceses enriched with ideas and suggestions, useful for performing your ministry more effectively, especially in relation to the new procedures relating to marriage nullity. This will be an important help to you so that, in the flock entrusted to you, you will enable the growth of the measure of the stature of Christ the Good Shepherd, from whom we must learn every day the wise search for the *unum necessarium*: the *salus animarum*. This is the supreme good and is identified with God Himself, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus taught. Trust in the infinite assistance of the Holy Spirit, Who invisibly but truly guides the Church”.

“Let us pray”, he concluded, “that He help you, and also the Successor of Peter, to respond with willingness and humility to the cry for help from so many of our brothers and sisters who need to see the truth of their marriage and of the path of their life”.
