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Audience with the Tribunal of the Roman Rota on the occasion of the inauguration of the Judicial Year

At 10.40 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the prelate auditors, officials, lawyers and collaborators of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, on the occasion of the solemn inauguration of the judicial year.

After greetings from the dean of the Roman Rota, H.E. Msgr. Pio Vito Pinto, the Pope gave the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Excellency,

Dear prelate auditors,

I address to you my warm greeting, beginning with the dean, whom I thank for his words. I greet those taking part in this meeting: the officials, the lawyers and the other collaborators of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota. To all of you I offer my sincere good wishes for the legal year we inaugurate today.

The society in which we live is increasingly secularized, and does not favour the growth of faith, with the consequence that Catholic faithful struggle to bear witness to a style of life in accordance with the Gospel, also with regard to the Sacrament of marriage. In such a context, it is necessary for the Church, in all her articulations, to act in harmony to offer adequate spiritual and pastoral support. In the daily ministry in the service of Christian marriage, you have the experience of two fundamental cornerstones, not only of theology and canon law of marriage, but also and first of all of the very essence of Christ's Church: *unity* and *fidelity*. These two matrimonial assets, indeed, before being, or rather *in order to be* legal obligations of any conjugal union in Christ, must be the epiphany of baptismal faith.

So as to be validly contracted, marriage requires of each of the betrothed a full *unity* and harmony with the other, so that, through the mutual exchange of their respective human, moral and spiritual riches – almost by way of communicating vessels – the two spouses become a single entity. Marriage also requires the commitment of fidelity, which absorbs all of life, becoming a stable *consortium totius vitae* (canon 1135).

Unity and fidelity are two important and necessary values not only among spouses, but in general in interpersonal and social relations. We are all aware of the inconveniences that are caused, in civil coexistence, by unfulfilled promises, the lack of fidelity to the word given and to commitments undertaken.

Unity and fidelity. These two assets, indispensable and constitutive of marriage, must not only be adequately illustrated to future spouses, but also demand the pastoral action of the Church, especially of bishops and priests, to accompany the family in the different phases of its formation and of its development. Such pastoral action naturally cannot be limited to the completion of paperwork, while this may be necessary and is to be carried out with care. There is a need for a triple preparation for marriage: remote, near and permanent. It is advisable for this latter to include in a serious and structural way the various phases of married life, through an accurate formation, intended to nurture in spouses the awareness of the values and commitments proper to their vocation.

The main subjects of this matrimonial formation, by virtue of their office and ministry, are pastors; however, it is more opportune than ever before – indeed, necessary – to involve the ecclesial communities in their various components, who are co-responsible in this pastoral care under the guidance of the diocesan bishop or the parish priest. The duty is therefore *in solidum*, with the primary responsibility of pastors and the active participation of the community in promoting marriage and in accompanying families with spiritual and formative support.

To understand this pastoral need, it will be good for us to consider, in the Scriptures, the experience of the holy spouses Aquila and Priscilla. They were among the most faithful companions of the mission of Saint Paul, who called them with grateful affection his *sinergoi*, that is his full collaborators in the concerns and the work of the Apostle. This high recognition on the part of Paul for the missionary work of these spouses is striking and moving; and at the same time it can be acknowledged how this synergy was a precious gift of the Spirit to the first Christian communities. Let us ask, therefore, that today too the Spirit give to the Church priests capable of appreciating and valuing the charisms of spouses with robust faith and apostolic spirit, such as Aquila and Priscilla.

The constant and permanent pastoral care of the Church for the good of marriage and of the family demands to be realized through various pastoral means: approaching the Word of God, especially through the *lectio divina*; spiritual discussion and direction; the participation in family groups and charitable service, to develop exchange with other families and openness to the needs of the most disadvantaged.

On the other hand, spouses who live their marriage with *generous unity* and with *faithful love*, supporting each other with the grace of the Lord and with the necessary support of the ecclesial community, represent in turn a precious pastoral help to the Church. Indeed, they offer to all an example of true love and become witnesses and co-workers in the fruitfulness of the Church herself. Truly many Christian couples are a silent prayer for all, a “weekday” prayer, I would say, for every day, and we must unfortunately note that a couple that lives for many years together does not make the news – this is sad – while scandals, separations and divorces do (cf. *Homily at Santa Marta*, Friday 18 May 2018).

This is the good news: that fidelity is possible, because it is a gift, in spouses as in priests. This is the news that should render stronger and comforting even the ministry of bishops and priests, faithful and full of love; just as the love and conjugal faithfulness of the spouses Aquila and Priscilla were of comfort to Paul and Apollo.

Dear prelate auditors, I reiterate to each one of you my gratitude for the good you do for the people of God, serving justice through your verdicts. Besides the importance of the judgement itself for the interested parties, they contribute to the correct interpretation of matrimonial law. This law is placed at the service of the *salus*

animarum and of the faith of spouses. Therefore, we understand the punctual reference to the verdicts of the Rota to the principles of Catholic doctrine, with regard to the natural idea of marriage, with its related duties and rights, and even more so concerning its sacramental reality.

Thank you very much for your work! I invoke divine assistance upon it, and I heartily impart my Apostolic Blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
