

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 211106c

Saturday 06.11.2021

Audience with members of the “Retrouvaille” Association

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Retrouvaille” Association, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank Msgr. Dal Cin and the couples for their words of greeting and introduction. I am glad that during this “*Amoris Laetitia* Family Year” there is also this meeting, dedicated to couples experiencing a crisis, a serious crisis in their relationship. This is very important: we must not be afraid of crises. Crises help us to grow, and what we must be careful about is not to fall into conflict, because when you fall into conflict you close your heart, and there is no solution to the conflict, or it is difficult to find one. Instead, a crisis makes you “wobble” a bit, it makes you feel unpleasant things at time, but one can emerge from a crisis, provided that you emerge better. You cannot come out of it the same as before: either you come out better, or you come out worse. This is important. And it is difficult to emerge from a crisis alone: we must always all come out of a crisis together. I like this. Do not be afraid of crises, be afraid of conflict!

The first word I would like to share with you is indeed *crisis*. We have stopped to reflect on this word many times in this period of pandemic (cf. *Address to the Curia*, 21 December 2020). And I identify with your experience, which invites us to consider crisis as an opportunity: yes, a painful opportunity, but an opportunity - in this case, an opportunity to make a qualitative leap in relationships. In the Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* there is a section devoted to family crises (cf. 232-238). And here I would like to immediately add another word: wounds. Because people’s crises cause wounds, they cause wounds to the heart and flesh. “Wounds” is a key word for you, it is part of *Retrouvaille*’s daily vocabulary. It is part of your history: in fact, you are wounded couples who have gone through the crisis and have healed; and because of this you are able to help other wounded couples. You have not gone away, you did not walk away in the crisis – “this isn’t working, I am going back to my mother”. You took the crisis in hand and sought a solution.

This is your gift, the experience you have lived and put at the service of others. I thank you very much for this. It is a valuable gift both on the personal level and on the ecclesial level. Today there is a great need for people, for spouses who know how to bear witness to the fact that the crisis is not a curse, it is part of the journey, and it constitutes an opportunity. And we too, priests and bishops, must take this road, and show that crisis is an opportunity. Otherwise, we would be priests and bishops closed up in ourselves, without real dialogue with other people. There is always crisis in real dialogue. But to be credible, one must have experienced it. It cannot be a theoretical discourse, a “pious exhortation”; it would not be credible. Instead, you bear witness to life. You have been in crisis, you have been wounded; thanks to God and with the help of your brothers and sisters you have been healed; and you have decided to share this experience of yours, to put it at the service of others. Thank you for this, because it is a gesture that makes us grow, that enables other couples to mature.

I was struck - in your experiential “baggage” - by the juxtaposition of the two biblical texts: that of the Good Samaritan and that of the Risen Jesus who shows His wounds to the disciples (*Lk* 10:25-37; *Jn* 20:19-29). I thank you because it has helped me to see better the link between the Good Samaritan and the Risen Christ, and to see that this link passes through the wounds, the sores. Jesus has always been recognised in the character of the Good Samaritan, even in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Your experience helps us to see that this Samaritan is the Risen Christ, who preserves the wounds in His glorious body and for this very reason - as the Letter to the Hebrews says (cf. 5:2) – He feels compassion for that wounded man abandoned by the roadside, for the wounds of us all.

After the dual concept of “crisis-wound”, I would like to share another word, which is “key” in family ministry: *to accompany*. It was one of the most important words in the 2014-2015 synodal process on the family, which resulted in the Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (cf. 217; 223; 232-246). *Accompanying*. This naturally concerns pastors, it is part of their ministry; but it also involves spouses in the first person, as protagonists of a community that “accompanies”. Your experience is a specific testimony to this. It is an experience born from the grassroots, as often happens when the Holy Spirit gives rise to new realities in the Church which respond to new needs. This was the case with “Retrouvaille”. Faced with the reality of so many couples in difficulty or already divided, the answer is first of all to accompany.

And here we are helped by another biblical icon: the risen Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus. Jesus does not appear from above, from heaven, to say in a thunderous voice: “You two, where are you going? Come back!” No. He walks alongside them along the road, without being recognised. He listens to their crisis. He invites them to tell, to express themselves. And then He redeems them from their foolishness, he surprises them by revealing to them a different perspective, which already existed, was already written, but they had not understood it: they had not understood that Christ had to suffer and die on the cross, that the crisis is part of the history of salvation... This is important: crisis is part of the history of salvation. And human life is not a life from a laboratory, an aseptic life, immersed in alcohol so there is nothing strange. Human life is a life in crisis, a life with all the problems that come up every day. And then that man, who was Jesus, that wayfarer, stops to eat with them and stays with them: He spends time with them. To accompany, to spend time without continually looking at the clock. Accompanying means “wasting time” to stay close in situations of crisis. And it often takes a lot of time, it takes patience, respect, it takes willingness... All this is accompanying. And you know this well.

Dear friends, I thank you for your commitment and I encourage you to continue. I entrust it to the protection of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. I bless you all, your families and I pray for the couples you accompany. And you too, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
