

At 12:30 P.M. today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Prelate Auditors, Officials, and Advocates of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota on the occasion of the Solemn Inauguration of the Judicial Year.

After the Salutation of the Dean, His Excellency Msgr. Pio Vito Pinto, the Pope gave in return to those present the following allocution, which we publish:

ALLOCUTION OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE TRIBUNAL OF THE ROMAN ROTA

2016

Dear Brethren,

I extend to you my cordial welcome, and thank the Dean for the words with which he introduced our meeting.

The ministry of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota has always been an aid to the Successor of Peter, so that the Church, inseparably connected to the family, may continue to proclaim the design of God the Creator and Redeemer on the sacredness and beauty of the institution of the family. [It is] a mission which is always actual, but which acquires a special relevance in our time.

Along with the definition of the Roman Rota as Tribunal of the Family,⁽¹⁾ I would like to underline the other prerogative, which is that of the Tribunal of Truth and the Sacred Bond. And these two aspects are complementary.

The Church, in fact, can demonstrate the indefectible merciful love of God towards the family, in particular those wounded by sin and by the trials of life, and with them proclaim the unrenounceable truth of marriage according to the design of God. This service is entrusted primarily to the Pope and the Bishops.

During the journey of the synod on the subject of the family, which the Lord enabled us to complete over the past two years, we were able to achieve, in a spirit and manner of effective collegiality, a profound discernment in wisdom, gratefully by which the Church has – among others things – indicated to the world that there cannot be confusion between the family intended by God and any other type of union.

With this same spiritual and pastoral frame of mind, your activity, both in the judging and the contributing unto permanent formation, assists and promotes the *opus veritatis*. When the Church, through your service, proposes unto itself the task of declaring the truth regarding a marriage in a concrete case, for the good of the faithful, at the same time she always keeps present how many, by free choice or by

unhappy circumstances of life,(2) living in an objective state of error, continue to be the object of the merciful love of Christ and for that reason the Church herself.

The family, founded on indissoluble, unitive, and procreative matrimony, belongs to the “dream” of God and His Church unto the salvation of mankind.(3)

As Blessed [Pope] Paul VI stated, the Church has always given “a special glance, full of solicitude and love, to the family and its problems. Through marriage and the family, God has wisely united two of the [greatest] human realities: the mission to transmit life, and the joint and legitimate love of man and woman, for which they are called to complete themselves jointly in a reciprocal donation that is not only physical, but above all else spiritual. Or, better said: God has wanted to render spouses partakers of His love: the personal love that He has for each one of us and for which He calls them to help one another and to give of themselves each to another in order to attain the fullness of their personal [lives]; and of the love that He brings to mankind and to all of His children, and for which He desires the multiplying of the children of men in order to render them partakers of His life and His eternal happiness”.(4)

The family and the Church, on different levels, work together to accompany the human being [toward attaining] the purpose of his existence. And they do so, of course, by means of the teachings that they transmit, but also by means of their own nature of being communities of love and life. In fact, if the family can be said to be the “domestic church”, to the Church appertains the title of Family of God. For this reason “the ‘familial spirit’ is a constitutional charter for the Church: it is in this way that Christianity must appear, and must be. It is written in clear letters: ‘You, who some time were afar off [...] – says Saint Paul – [...] you are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God (Eph. 2:19).’ The Church is and must be the family of God.”(5)

And precisely because she is Mother and Teacher, the Church knows that, among Christians, some have a strong faith, formed by charity, reinforced by good catechesis, and nourished by prayer and the sacramental life, while others have a weak faith, obscured, unformed, [poorly] educated, or forgotten.

It is good to repeat with clarity that the quality of faith is not an essential condition of matrimonial consent, which, according to the doctrine of the Church, can be undermined only on the natural level (cf. can. 1055, § 1 and 2 CIC). In fact, the *habitus fidei* is infused from the moment of Baptism and continues to have a mysterious influence in the soul, even when the faith has not been developed and psychologically appears to be absent. It is not rare for those who are betrothed, impelled towards true matrimony of the *instinctus naturae*, at the moment of celebration, to have a conscience limited in the design of the project of God, and only afterwards, in the life of the family, to discover all that God the Creator and Redeemer has established for them. Deficiencies in the formation of the faith and even error regarding the sacramental unity, indissolubility, and dignity of marriage vitiate matrimonial consent only if they determine the will (cf. can. 1099 CIC). It is precisely for this reason that errors regarding the sacramentality of marriage must be weighed very carefully. The Church, therefore, with a renewed sense of responsibility continues to propose marriage in its essential elements – children, the good of spouses, unity, indissolubility, sacramentality (6), not as an ideal for the few, notwithstanding modern models centered on the ephemeral or the transitory, but as a reality which, in the grace of Christ, can be lived by

all of the baptized faithful. And therefore, for all the more reason, a pastoral urgency that concerns all of the structures of the Church urges [us] to converge towards a common goal ordered to an adequate preparation unto marriage, in a sort of new catechumenate – I underline the following: in a sort of new catechumenate –desired so much by some Synodal Fathers.(7)

Dear Brethren, the time in which we live is very tasking both for families, and for us pastors who are called to walk with them. With this understanding, I extend to you all [my wishes for your] good work in the new year that the Lord has granted us. I assure you of my prayers and rely, as well, upon yours. May the Madonna and Saint Joseph obtain from the Church growth in the spirit of the family, and from families [the sentiment that they themselves are] an evermore living and active part of the People of God. Thank you.

(1) PIUS XII, *Allocution to the Roman Rota*, 1 October 1940: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 October 1940, p. 1.

(2) “Perhaps this entire scourge has an extremely generic name, but in this tragically true case, it is egotism. If egotism governs the kingdom of human love, which is precisely that family, it vilifies it, renders it sad, it dissolves it. The art of loving it not as easy as is commonly believed. Passion is even less. Nor is pleasure.” (G.B. MONTINI, *Pastoral Letter of the Ambrosian Archdiocese for the beginning of Lent 1960*).

(3) Cf. PIUS XI, Ency. Letter *Casti Connubii*, 31 December 1930: AAS 22 (1930), 541.

(4) PAUL VI, *Allocution to the Participants of XIII National Congress for the Centro Italiano Femminile*, 12 February 1966: AAS 58 (1966), 219. St. John Paul II in his Letter to the Families stated that the family is the way of the Church: “the first and most important” (*Gratissimam Sane*, 2 February 1994, 2: AAS 86 [1994], 868).

(5) *Catechesis in General Audience* of 7 October 2015.

(6) Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Bono Coniugali*, 24, 32; *De Genesi ad Litteram*, 9, 7, 12.

(7) “This preparation unto marriage, We think, will be facilitated, if the formation of a family will be presented to the youth, and if it will be understood as [being] a vocation by one who intends to found one’s own household, as a mission, as a great duty, that gives unto life highest vision, and fills it with its gifts and its virtues. May this presentation neither deform or exaggerate reality” (G.B. MONTINI, *Pastoral Letter to the Ambrosian Archdiocese*, loc. cit.).

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