The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO ENGAGED COUPLES PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

Saint Peter's Square
Friday, 14 February 2014

Video

The fear of "forever"

Nicolas and Marie Alexia, a young engaged couple from Gibraltar, asked: "Your Holiness, many today think that life-long fidelity is too challenging; many feel that the struggle to live together may be beautiful, enchanting, but it is difficult, even impossible. We ask you for a word to enlighten us on this". The Holy Father responded:

I thank you for your witness and for the question. Let me explain to you: they sent me these questions ahead of time... you know... and so I was able to reflect and think of an answer that is a little more solid.

It's important to ask yourself if it is possible to love each other "forever". This is a question that must be asked: is it possible to love "forever"? Today so many people are afraid of making definitive decisions. One boy said to his bishop: "I want to become a priest, but only for ten years". He was afraid of a definitive choice. But that is a general fear that comes from our culture. To make life decisions seems impossible. Today everything changes so quickly, nothing lasts long. And this mentality leads many who are preparing for marriage to say: "we are together as long as the love lasts", and then? All the best and see you later... and so ends the marriage. But what do we mean by "love"? Is it only a feeling, a psychophysical state? Certainly, if that is it, then we cannot build on anything solid. But if, instead, love is a *relationship*, then it is a reality that grows,

and we can also say by way of example that it is built up like a home. And a home is built together, not alone! To build something here means to foster and aid growth. Dear engaged couples, you are preparing to grow together, to build this home, to live together forever. You do not want to found it on the sand of sentiments, which come and go, but on the rock of true love, the love that comes from God. The family is born from this plan of love, it wants to grow just as a home is built, as a place of affection, of help, of hope, of support. As the love of God is stable and forever, so too should we want the love on which a family is based to be stable and forever. Please, we mustn't let ourselves be overcome by the "culture of the provisory"! Today this culture invades us all, this culture of the temporary. This is not right!

How, then, does one cure this fear of the "forever"? One cures it day by day, by entrusting oneself to the Lord Jesus in a life that becomes a daily spiritual journey, made in steps — little steps, steps of shared growth — it is accomplished through a commitment to becoming men and women who are mature in faith. For, dear engaged couples, "forever" is not only a question of duration! A marriage is not successful just because it endures; quality is important. To stay together and to know how to love one another forever is the challenge for Christian couples. What comes to mind is the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves: for you too, the Lord can multiply your love and give it to you fresh and good each day. He has an infinite reserve! He gives you the love that stands at the foundation of your union and each day he renews and strengthens it. And he makes it ever greater when the family grows with children. On this journey prayer is important, it is necessary, always: he for her, she for him and both together. Ask Jesus to multiply your love. In the prayer of the *Our Father* we say: "Give us this day our daily bread". Spouses can also learn to pray like this: "Lord, give us this day our daily love", for the daily love of spouses is bread, the true bread of the soul, what sustains them in going forward. And the prayer: can we practice to see if we know how to say it? "Lord give us this day our daily love". All together! [couples: "Lord give us this day our daily love"] One more time! [couples: "Lord give us this day our daily love"]. This is the prayer for engaged couples and spouses. Teach us to love one another, to will good to the other! The more you trust in him, the more your love will be "forever", able to be renewed, and it will conquer every difficulty. This was what I thought I would like to say to you, responding to your question. Thank you!

Living together: The 'style' of married life

This question was asked by Stefano and Valentina, two young people from Ciociaria. "Your Holiness, every day life together is beautiful, it gives joy, and support. But it is a challenge to face. We believe that we need to learn how to love one another. There is a "style" of life as a couple, a spirituality of daily life that we want to take on. Can you help us in this Holy Father?" The Pope responded:

Living together is an art, a patient, beautiful, fascinating journey. It does not end once you have won each other's love... Rather, it is precisely there where it begins! This journey of every day has

a few rules that can be summed up in three phrases which you already said, phrases which I have already repeated many times to families, and which you have already learned to use among yourselves: *May I* — that is, "*can I*", you said — *thank you*, and *I'm sorry*.

"*Can I, may I*?" This is the polite request to enter the life of another with respect and care. One should learn how to ask: may I do this? Would you like for us to do this? Should we take up this initiative, to educate our children in this way? Do you want to go out tonight? ... In short, to ask permission means to know how to enter with courtesy into the lives of others. Pay attention to this: to know how to enter with courtesy into the lives of others. It's not easy, not easy at all. Sometimes, however, manners are used in a heavy way, like hiking boots! True love does not impose itself harshly and aggressively. In the *Fioretti* of St Francis we find this expression: "For know, dear brother, that courtesy is one of the attributes of God, for courtesy is the sister of charity, it extinguisheth hatred and kindleth love" (Ch. 37). Yes, courtesy kindles love. And today in our families, in our world, which is frequently violent and arrogant, there is so much need for courtesy. And this can begin at home.

"*Thank you*". It seems so easy to say these words, but we know that it is not. But it is important! We teach it to children, but then we ourselves forget it! Gratitude is an important sentiment! Do you remember the Gospel of Luke? An old woman once said to me in Buenos Aires: "gratitude is a flower that grows on a noble ground". Nobility of soul is necessary so that this flower might grow. Do you remember the Gospel of Luke? Jesus heals ten lepers and then only one returns to say thank you to Jesus. The Lord says: and the other nine, where are they? This also holds true for us: do we know how to give thanks? In your relationship, and tomorrow in married life, it is important to keep alive the awareness that the other person is a gift from God — and for the gifts of God we say thank you! — we must always give thanks for them. And in this interior attitude one says thank you to the other for everything. It is not a kind word to use with strangers, to show you are polite. You need to know how to say thank you in order to go forward in a good way together in married life.

The third: "*I'm sorry*". In life we err frequently, we make many mistakes. We all do. Wait, maybe someone here has never made a mistake? Raise your hand if you are that someone, there: a person who has never made a mistake? We all do it! All of us! Perhaps not a day goes by without making some mistake. The Bible says that the just man sins seven times a day. And, thus, we make mistakes... Hence the need to use these simple words: "I'm sorry". In general each of us is ready to accuse the other and to justify ourselves. This began with our father Adam, when God asks him: "Adam, have you eaten of the fruit?". "Me? No! It was her, she gave it to me!". Accusing the other to avoid saying "I'm sorry", "forgive me". It's an old story! It is an instinct that stands at the origin of so many disasters. Let us learn to acknowledge our mistakes and to ask for forgiveness. "Forgive me if today I raised my voice"; "I'm sorry if I passed without greeting you"; "excuse me if I was late", "if this week I was very silent", "if I spoke too much without ever listening"; "excuse me if I forgot"; "I'm sorry I was angry and I took it out on you"... We can say

many “I’m sorry”s every day. In this way, too, a Christian family grows. We all know that the perfect family does not exist, nor a perfect husband or wife... we won’t even speak about a perfect mother-in-law. We sinners exist. Jesus, who knows us well, teaches us a secret: don’t let a day end without asking forgiveness, without peace returning to our home, to our family. It is normal for husband and wife to quarrel, but there is always something, we had quarreled... Perhaps you were mad, perhaps plates flew, but please remember this: never let the sun go down without making peace! Never, never, never! This is a secret, a secret for maintaining love and making peace. Pretty words are not necessary... Sometimes just a simple gesture and... peace is made. Never let a day end... for if you let the day end without making peace, the next day what is inside of you is cold and hardened and it is even more difficult to make peace. Remember: never let the sun go down without making peace! If we learn to say sorry and ask one another for forgiveness, the marriage will last and move forward. When elderly couples, celebrating 50 years together, come to audiences or Mass here at Santa Marta I ask them: “Who supported whom?” This is beautiful! Everyone looks at each other, they look at me and say: “Both!”. And this is beautiful! This is a beautiful witness!

The style of celebrating marriage

The last question was asked by Miriam and Marco, a young engaged couple from Massa Carrara, “Your Holiness, in these months we are preparing for our wedding. Can you give us some advice on how to celebrate our marriage well?”. The Pope answered:

Make it a real celebration — because marriage is a celebration — a Christian celebration, not a worldly feast! The Gospel of John points to the most profound reason for joy on that day: do you remember the miracle at the wedding in Cana? At a certain point there was no more wine and the celebration seemed to be ruined. Imagine drinking tea at the end of a celebration! No, it’s not good! There is no party without wine! At Mary’s suggestion, in that moment Jesus reveals himself for the first time and gives a sign: he transforms water into wine, thus saving the wedding feast. What happened in Cana 2,000 years ago, happens today at every wedding celebration: that which makes your wedding full and profoundly true will be the presence of the Lord who reveals himself and gives his grace. It is his presence that offers the “good wine”, he is the secret to full joy, that which truly warms the heart. It is the presence of Jesus at the celebration. May it be a beautiful celebration, but with Jesus! Not with a worldly spirit, no! You can feel it when the Lord is there.

At the same time, however, it is good that your wedding be simple and make what is truly important stand out. Some are more concerned with the exterior details, with the banquet, the photographs, the clothes, the flowers... These are important for a celebration, but only if they point to the real reason for your joy: the Lord’s blessing on your love. Make it so that, like the wine in Cana, the exterior signs of your celebration reveal the Lord’s presence and remind you and everyone present of the origin and the reason for your joy.

But there is something that you said that I would like to address immediately because I do not want to let it slip away. Marriage is also an everyday task, I could say a craftsman's task, a goldsmith's work, because the husband has the duty of making the wife more of a woman and the wife has the duty of making the husband more of a man. Growing also in humanity, as man and woman. And this you do together. This is called growing together. This does not come out of thin air! The Lord blesses it but it comes from your hands, from your attitudes, from your way of loving each other. To make us grow! Always act so that the other may grow. Work at this. And thus, I don't know, I am thinking of you that one day you will walk along the streets of your town and the people will say: "Look at that beautiful woman, so strong!...". "With the husband that she has, it's understandable!". And to you too: "Look at him and how he is!...". "With the wife he has, I can understand why!". It's this, reaching this point: making one another grow together, one another. And the children will have the inheritance of having a father and a mother who grew together, making each other — one another — more of a man and more of a woman!

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