



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE JOHN PAUL II INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

Thursday, 31 May 2001

*Eminent Cardinals, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am very happy to celebrate with you, teachers, students and staff, the 20th anniversary of your, or rather our, Institute for Studies of Marriage and Family. Thank you for your welcome presence.

I cordially greet all of you and I wish to greet in a special way the Chancellor, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the President of the Superior Council of the Institute, Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, and Archbishop Carlo Caffarra, of Ferrara, who launched the Institute. Finally, let me offer a special greeting to Bishop Angelo Scola, President of the Institute, the teachers and students, the staff and all those who in any way cooperate in the activity of the academic centre.

This anniversary is an obvious sign of the Church's involvement in marriage and the family, that are among the greatest goods of humanity, as I said in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, written 20 years ago this year.

From the moment that the Institute is present with different sections on all continents, the original intuition behind the founding of the Institute has become fruitful, coming into contact as it does with new situations and facing today's radical challenges.

2. Taking up the themes dealt with in previous talks to the Institute, I want to draw your attention to the great need of *an adequate anthropology which intends to understand and interpret the human person in what makes him/her essentially human.*

In fact, the forgetfulness of the principle of God's creation of the human person as male and female, represents one of the major critical problems of contemporary society and it brings with it a sweeping decline in respect for the human person in cultural expressions, moral sensitivity and legal enactments. When the principle gets lost, the perception of the singular dignity of the human person is lost and the way is open for an invasive "culture of death".

However, the experience of love, properly understood, remains a simple and universal gateway through which everyone can pass in order to gain an awareness of what makes a person a human being: reason, affection and freedom. Within the continuously raised questions about the meaning of the person, and moving from the principle of the human person's being *created male and female in the image and likeness of God*, the believer can recognize the mystery of the Trinitarian face of God, who creates a human being by placing on him the seal of his reality of love and communion.

3. The sacrament of marriage and the family that proceeds from it, represent the valid way through which the grace of Christ grants to the children of the Church a real participation in Trinitarian *communion*. The Risen Lord's spousal love for his Church, offered in the sacrament of marriage, also raises up in the church the gift of virginity for the kingdom. In its turn, virginity indicates the final destiny of conjugal love. In this way, the nuptial mystery helps us to discover that the Church is the family of God. In this connection, see how, by exploring the nature of the sacrament of matrimony, the Institute contributes to the renewal of ecclesiology.

4. The whole question of the origin of human life and *methods of procreation* is another burning issue that affects the prospects for marriage and family. With growing insistence, plans are devised that place the beginnings of human life in situations that are completely divorced from the marital union of husband and wife. These plans are often supported by purported medical and scientific reasons. In fact, with the pretext of ensuring a better quality of life through genetic control, or of progress in medical and scientific research, experiments on human embryos and methods for their production are proposed that open the door to the use of the person as an object and run the risk of abuse by those who arrogate to themselves an arbitrary and limitless power over the human being.

The full truth on marriage and family, revealed in Christ, is a light that allows us to discern what constitutes the authentically human elements in procreation. As the Second Vatican Council taught, "the spouses joined by the marriage bond are called to express by means of acts that are moral and worthy of marriage" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 49) their mutual self-giving and to accept with responsibility and gratitude children, "the most precious gift of marriage" (*ibid.*, n. 50). They become collaborators in their physical self-giving with the love of God the Creator. Participating in the gift of life and love, they receive the capacity of corresponding to it and transmitting it in turn.

The union of the spouses in matrimonial love and the corporal mediation of the conjugal act are

the only place in which the singular value of the new human being called to life is fully recognized and respected. Man cannot be reduced to his genetic and biological components, which certainly also form a part of his personal dignity. Every person who comes into the world is called from eternity to participate in Christ, through the Spirit, in the fullness of life in God. That is why, from the mysterious instant of his conception, he must be accepted and treated as a person created in the image and likeness of God himself (cf. Gen 1,26).

5. Another set of challenges that await an adequate response from the research and activity of the Institute are of a legal and social nature.

In some countries in recent years, permissive legislation, founded on partial or erroneous concepts of freedom, have favoured what are called alternative models of family, which are not founded on the irrevocable commitment of a man and a woman to form a "lifetime community". The specific rights recognized up until now for the family, primary cell of society, have been extended to forms of association, *de facto* unions, civil pacts of solidarity (PAC), tailored only to personal needs and desires, to the struggle for juridical and legal recognition of options unjustly considered as the vanguard of freedom. Who cannot see that the misleading promotion of such juridical and institutional models creates yet another trend to dissolve the primary right of the family to be recognized as the chief subject of social rights and obligations?

I want to repeat forcefully that the institution of the family, created to allow the human person to attain in an adequate way a sense of his own dignity, offers him a place to grow in conformity with his natural dignity and his vocation as a human person. Family bonds come first and pave the way for other forms of solidarity in society. By promoting an in-depth awareness of the family in conformity with its academic statutes and mission, the Institute contributes to developing the culture of life that I have often advocated.

6. Twenty years ago in *Familiaris consortio*, I affirmed that "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" (n. 86). I repeat it again today with greater conviction and increasing concern. I repeat it with full confidence, entrusting you and your work to our Lady of Fatima, in these years the kind and strong Patroness of your Institute. To her as Queen of the Family, I entrust all your plans and the course that opens before you at the beginning of the third millennium.

In assuring you of my prayers I cordially impart my blessing.