



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE FORMATION COURSE PROMOTED
BY THE TRIBUNAL OF THE ROMAN ROTA***

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Thursday, 27 September 2018 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a joy for me to meet with you at the conclusion of the formation course on marriage and the family organized by the Diocese of Rome and by the [Tribunal of the Roman Rota](#). I cordially greet each one of you and I thank the Cardinal Vicar, the Dean of the Rota and those who have collaborated in these days of study and reflection. They have given you the occasion to examine the challenges and pastoral projects concerning the family, considered as domestic church and sanctuary of life. It is a vast, complex and delicate apostolic field, to which it is necessary to dedicate energy and enthusiasm, with the intent to promote the Gospel of the family and of life. In this regard, how can one fail to recall the broad and far-sighted vision of my Predecessors, in particular, that of [Saint John Paul II](#), who boldly promoted the principle of the family, crucial and irreplaceable for the common good of peoples?

In their wake, I have developed this theme, particularly in the Apostolic Exhortation [Amoris Laetitia](#), focusing on the urgency of a serious journey of Christian marriage preparation which is not limited to a few meetings. Marriage is not merely a 'social' event but a true Sacrament that entails an appropriate preparation and an informed celebration. The marriage bond, in fact, requires the engaged couple to make a conscious choice that confirms their willingness to build up and strengthen the bond that can never be betrayed or abandoned. In the different Dioceses of the world, initiatives are being developed to make pastoral care of the family — which means, first and foremost, accompanying engaged couples toward marriage — better adapted to the real situation. It is important to offer engaged couples the opportunity to participate in seminars and prayer retreats which involve as animators, in addition to priests, also married couples with solid family experience, and experts in psychological disciplines.

Quite often, the very root of problems that come to light after the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony is to be found not only in a latent and unsuspected immaturity that suddenly explodes, but especially in the *weakness of Christian faith* and *the absence of accompaniment* from the Church, in the solitude in which young spouses are generally left after the wedding. Only when they are faced with everyday life together, which calls spouses to grow on a journey of giving and sacrifice, do some realize that they had not fully understood what they were about to begin. And they find themselves unprepared, especially when faced with the magnitude and meaning of Christian marriage with regard to the practical implications linked to the indissolubility of the bond, to being open to pass on the gift of life, and to fidelity.

That is why I reaffirm the need for a *permanent catechumenate* for the Sacrament of Matrimony, which concerns its preparation, celebration and the initial times that follow. It is a journey to be shared with priests, pastoral workers and Christian spouses. Priests, especially parish priests, are the first interlocutors of young people who wish to form a new family and to wed in the Sacrament of Matrimony. The support of the ordained minister will help the future spouses to understand that marriage between a man and a woman is a sign of the spousal union between Christ and the Church, helping them to become aware of the profound meaning of the step they are about to take. The deeper and longer the preparatory path is, the more young people will learn to correspond to God's grace and strength, and will develop the 'antibodies' to face the inevitable moments of difficulty and struggle in conjugal and family life.

In marriage preparation courses it is indispensable to re-read the *catechesis of the Christian initiation of faith*, whose content must not be taken for granted or as if already known by the engaged couples. On the contrary, more often than not the whole Christian message is to be rediscovered for those who have come to a halt at some elementary notion of the Catechism of First Communion or, if all goes well, that of Confirmation. Experience teaches that the time of marriage preparation is a time of grace in which the couple is particularly amenable to listen to the Gospel and to accept Jesus as Teacher of life. Through the couples' sincere attitude of openness, with an appropriate explanation and a clear presentation of the contents, it is possible to trigger dynamics that can fill in the gaps that are so widespread today: be it the lack of catechetical formation or the absence of filial sentiment towards the Church, which nevertheless is part of the foundations of Christian marriage.

Pastoral care is most effectively realized where the *accompaniment* doesn't end with the wedding, but 'escorts' at least the first years of conjugal life. Through conversations with the individual couple and moments in community, young spouses can be helped to acquire the instruments and the support for living their vocation. And this cannot occur but through a path of growth in the faith of the couples themselves. In this respect, the fragility often found in young people approaching marriage makes it necessary to accompany them on their journey beyond the wedding celebration. And, experience also tells us, this is a joy for them and for those who accompany them. It is an experience of joyful maternity, when the newlyweds are the object of the attentive

concern of the Church which, in the footsteps of her Teacher, is a thoughtful mother who does not neglect, does not discard, but draws near with tenderness, embraces and encourages.

Regarding those spouses who experience *serious problems* in their relationship and who find themselves in a situation of crisis, it is important to help them revive their faith and rediscover the grace of the Sacrament; and, in certain cases — to be evaluated with honesty and interior freedom — to offer appropriate advice to undertake a process of annulment. May those who have come to realize that their union is not in fact a true sacramental marriage, and who wish to exit this situation, be able to find in the Bishops, priests and pastoral workers the necessary accompaniment expressed, not only in the communication of juridical norms, but first and foremost in an attitude of listening and understanding. In this regard, the regulations on the new marriage process are a valid instrument which must be applied concretely and without distinction by all, at all ecclesial levels, since its ultimate reason is the *salus animarum*! I was pleased to learn that many Bishops and Judicial Vicars promptly embraced and implemented the new marriage process, offering comfort and peace of mind, especially to the poorest and those distanced from our ecclesial communities.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your commitment in favour of proclaiming the Gospel of the family. I hope that the future of diocesan pastoral care of the family will expand ever more, assuming the style proper to the Gospel, meeting and welcoming also those young people who choose to cohabit without being married. It is essential to bear them witness to the beauty of marriage! May the Holy Spirit help you to be workers of peace and consolation, especially for those who are most fragile and in need of accompaniment and pastoral solicitude. I impart my heartfelt blessing to you and I ask you, please, to pray for me.