



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING PROMOTED
BY THE PONTIFICAL JOHN PAUL II INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES ON MARRIAGES AND FAMILY**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 13 May 2011*

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With joy I welcome you today, a few days after the [Beatification of Pope John Paul II](#) who, 30 years ago, as we heard, chose to found at the same time the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#) and your Pontifical Institute, two entities that show how firmly convinced he was of the family's importance for the Church and for society.

I greet the representatives of your great community that now reaches across all the continents, as well as the praiseworthy Foundation for Marriage and Family which I created to support your mission. I thank your President, Mons. Melina, for his words on behalf of you all.

The new Blessed [John Paul II](#), who, as was mentioned, was the victim of that terrible attack in St Peter's Square 30 years ago, entrusted to you, in particular, the study, research and dissemination of his "Catecheses on human love" that contain a profound reflection on the human body. Joining the theology of the body with that of love in order to find unity in the human journey: this is the theme I would like to point out to you as a horizon for your work.

Shortly after the death of Michelangelo, Paolo Veronese was summoned by the Inquisition, accused of having depicted inappropriate figures in his "Last Supper". The artist replied that even in the Sistine Chapel bodies were depicted nude, with little reverence. It was the Inquisitor himself

who took Michelangelo's defence, with a reply that has become famous: "But in these figures what is there that is not inspired by the Holy Spirit?". As people of the modern age, we struggle to understand these words because the body appears to us as inert matter, heavy, opposed to knowledge and to the freedom proper to the spirit. However the bodies Michelangelo depicted are robed in love, life, splendour. He wanted in this way to show that our bodies hide a mystery. In them the spirit is manifest and active. They are called to be spiritual bodies, as St Paul says (cf. 1 Cor 15:44).

Consequently we can ask ourselves: can this destiny of the body enlighten the stages of its journey? If our body is called to be spiritual, should not its history be that of the covenant between body and spirit? Indeed, far from being opposed to the spirit, the body is the place where the spirit can dwell. In this light it is possible to understand that our bodies are not inert, heavy matter but, if we know how to listen, they speak the language of true love.

The first word of this language is found in the creation of the human person. The body speaks to us of an origin that we have not conferred upon ourselves. "You knit me in my mother's womb", the Psalmist says to the Lord (Ps 139: 13). We can affirm that the body, in revealing our origin to us, bears within itself a filial significance because it reminds us that we are generated, and leads us back, through our parents who passed on life to us, to God the Creator. Only when he recognizes the originating love which has given this life can the human person accept himself, be reconciled with nature and with the world.

The creation of Adam is followed by the creation of Eve. The flesh received from God is required to make possible the union of love between man and woman and transmit life. Before the Fall the bodies of Adam and Eve appear in perfect harmony. There is a language in them that they did not create, an *eros* rooted in their nature which invites them to receive one another reciprocally from the Creator, so as to be able to give themselves.

Thus we understand that in love the human person is "re-created". *Incipit vita nuova* [a new life begins], as Dante said, (*Vita Nuova* I, 1), the life of the new unity of the two in one flesh. The true appeal of sexuality is born of the vastness of this horizon that opens up: integral beauty, the universe of the other person and of the "we" that is born of the union, the promise of communion that is hidden therein, the new fruitfulness, the path towards God, the source of love, which love opens up.

The union in one flesh then becomes a union for the whole of life, until the man and woman become one spirit as well. Thus a journey begins in which the body teaches us the value of time, of that slow maturation in love. In this light the virtue of chastity takes on new meaning. It is not a "no" to the pleasures and joys of life, but a great "yes" to love as a profound communication between persons, a communication that requires time and respect as they journey together towards fullness and as a love that becomes capable of generating life and of generously

welcoming the new life that is born.

It is true that the body also has a negative language: one hears talk of oppression of the other, of the desire to possess and exploit. However, we know that this language is not part of God's original plan but, rather, is the result of sin. When it is separated from its filial meaning, from its connection with the Creator, the body rebels against the person, loses its capacity to let communion shine through and becomes a place for the appropriation of the other. Is this not perhaps the drama of that sexuality which today remains enclosed in the narrow circle of one's own body and emotions, but which in reality can only find fulfilment in that call to something greater?

In this regard John Paul II spoke of the humility of the body. One of Claudel's characters says to his beloved: "I am not able to keep the promise that my body made to you", which prompts the reply: "You can break the body, but not the promise". (*Le soulier de satin* [*The Satin Slipper*], Day 3, Scene XIII).

The power of this promise explains how the Fall is not the last word about the body in salvation history. God also offers the human person a process of the redemption of the body, the language of which is preserved in the family. If after the Fall Eve is given the name "Mother of the Living", this testifies to the fact that the power of sin is not capable of obliterating the original language of the body, the blessing of life that God continues to offer when a man and woman are joined in one flesh. The family: this is the place where the theology of the body and the theology of love are interwoven. Here we learn the goodness of the body, its witness to a good origin, in the experience of the love we receive from our parents. Here lives the self-giving in a single flesh, in the conjugal charity that unites the spouses. Here we experience that the fruitfulness of love and life is interwoven with that of other generations. It is in the family that the human person discovers that he or she is not in a relationship as an autonomous person, but as a child, spouse or parent, whose identity is founded in being called to love, to receive from others and to give him or herself to others.

This journey of creation finds its fullness in the Incarnation, in the coming of Christ. God took a body, revealed himself in it. The upward movement of the body is hence integrated in another, more original movement, the humble movement of God who lowers himself towards the body, in order to raise it to him. As Son, he received a filial body in gratitude and in listening to the Father, and he gave this body for us, by so doing to generate the new body of the Church. The liturgy of the Feast of the Ascension sings the story of the flesh, sinner in Adam, assumed and redeemed by Christ. It is a flesh that becomes ever filled increasingly with light and the Spirit, filled with God.

Thus we see the depth of the theology of the body. When it is interpreted in the whole of tradition, it does not run the risk of superficiality and allows us to understand the greatness of the vocation to love, which is a call to a communion of persons in the twofold form of life of virginity and

marriage.

Dear friends, your Institute has been placed under the protection of Our Lady. Concerning Mary Dante said some words that are enlightening for a theology of the body: “For in thy womb rekindling shone the love” (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 7). The Love which generates the Church was incarnate in her female body. May the Mother of the Lord continue to protect you on your journey and make fruitful your studies and your teaching in service to the Church’s mission for the family and society. May you be accompanied by the Apostolic Blessing which I cordially impart to you all. Thank you.