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Audience with the Academic Community of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the academic community of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you, who form the academic community of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences. I thank Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia – he deserves a Nobel Prize for creativity! – your Grand Chancellor, for the words he addressed to me. I greet the President, Msgr. Philippe Bordeyne, the vice presidents of the *extra urbe* sections, the most distinguished professors and all of you, dear students, along with the couples who have started the course in ongoing formation at the Institute. Your international representation highlights the breadth and the richness of the network that the Institute leads; it represents a resource for the Church and for society.

Five years have passed since, with the *Motu proprio Summa familiae cura*, I wished to “invest” in this legacy left by Saint John Paul II, who founded the Institute in 1981. I intended to give it new vigour and a broader development, to respond to the challenges arising at the beginning of the third millennium. I consider this hoped-for development – guaranteed by the academic quality in the theological disciplines and in the human and social sciences – to be particularly important, as it integrates the skills needed to discern the relational values proper to the family constellation. Theology itself, in order to live up to this expansion, is required to elaborate a Christian vision of parenthood, filiality and fraternity – not only, therefore, the conjugal bond – which corresponds to the family experience, within the horizon of the entire human and Christian community. Also the culture of grandparents, which is very important. Indeed, the culture of faith is required to measure itself, without naivety and without submission, in relation to the transformations that mark the current consciousness of relations between man and woman, between love and generation, between family and community.

I appreciate and encourage your commitment to carrying forward with consistency and creativity the magisterial project that inspires its legacy and its updating. It is a commitment that, day by day, fills with content the title of “pontifical” attributed to the Institute, to be understood in its full significance: that is, serving the Church in the tradition of Peter's ministry is the gift that it receives and, at the same time, transmits. This is why it would be a serious mistake to interpret its renewed connection with the living Magisterium in terms of opposition to the mission received with its original institution. In reality, the seed grows and generates flowers and fruit. If the seed does not grow, it stays there, like a museum piece, but it does not grow.

The Church's mission today urgently solicits the integration of the theology of the conjugal bond with a more concrete theology of the family condition. The unprecedented turbulences, that put all family bonds to the test in our time, demand careful discernment to grasp the signs of God's wisdom and mercy. We are not prophets of doom, but of hope. Therefore, in considering the reasons for the crisis, we will never lose sight also of the consoling, at times moving signs of the capacity that family bonds continue to show: in favour of the community of faith, civil society, and human coexistence. We have all seen how valuable the tenacity, the resilience, and the cooperation of family bonds are in times of vulnerability and duress.

The family remains an irreplaceable “anthropological grammar” of fundamental human affections. The strength of all bonds of solidarity and love learns its secrets there, in the family. When this grammar is neglected or disrupted, the entire order of human and social relations suffers from its wounds. And at times they are deep wounds, very deep.

For example: does not social volunteering draw the symbols and modalities of its best relationships from these generative and fraternal bonds of love? Does not the protection of the defenceless have its root in care for offspring? Fraternity is not an easy experience, of course, but is there a better way than being born as brothers and sisters to come to understand the meaning of being - all of us - equally human?

Here, brothers and sisters, are the frontiers of the challenge that summons us to pick up the thread of the diffusion of all the components of family love – not only that of the couple – for society as a whole. The quality of marriage and the family determines the quality of love of the individual person and the bonds of the human community itself. It is therefore the responsibility of both the State and the Church to listen to families, with a view to an affectionate, supportive, effective proximity: to support them in the work they already do for everyone, encouraging their vocation for a more human, or rather more united and fraternal world. We must safeguard the family but not imprison it, make it grow as it should grow. Beware of meddling ideologies that explain the family from an ideological point of view. The family is not an ideology, but a reality. And a family grows with the vitality of reality. But when ideologies come along to explain or whitewash the family, what happens destroys everything. There is a family that has this grace of being a man and a woman who love each other and create, and to understand the family we must always go what is tangible, not ideologies. Ideologies ruin, ideologies meddle in order to create a path of destruction. Beware of ideologies!

We must not expect the family to be perfect, to take care of its vocation and encourage its mission. Marriage and the family will always have imperfections, until we are in Heaven. To newly-weds I always say: if you want, quarrel, as much as you want, but provided you make peace before the day is out. This capacity to “make up” that the family has when faced with difficulties is a grace, because if one does not make up, the “cold war” of the day after is dangerous. And yet, we deliver our own imperfection to the Lord, because drawing from the grace of the sacrament a blessing for the creature entrusted with the transmission of the meaning of life - not only of physical life - is God's “possible”.

Much, in this society full of fractures, depends on the rediscovered joy of the family adventure inspired by God. For thirty years, the incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son consisted of dwelling and taking root within the family and community bonds of his human condition. It was not a simple time of “waiting”, it was a time of “understanding” with the most ordinary human condition, dwelling with his gaze fixed on “the things of the Father” (cf. Lk 2:49).

I would like to tell you about an experience I had in the square [Saint Peter's], when I was greeting people in the

square before the pandemic. A couple, they seemed young – sixty years of marriage! – yes, they were young because she was eighteen when they married, and he was twenty, and I said, “But don’t you get bored after so many years? Are you happy?”. They looked at each other, I paused, and then they turned around, weeping, and said, “We love each other”. It was their answer after sixty years. This was the best, most beautiful theology on the family I have seen.

May the Lord accompany the passion of your faith and the rigour of your intelligence, in the formidable task of supporting, caring for, rejoicing in – yes, rejoicing in – this creaturely and ecclesial blessing that is the family. I rejoice to know and perceive that you are also devoting yourselves to this task through the development of a family atmosphere and a synodal spirit in the academic community itself. May the Mother of the Lord, who more than any of us is an expert in this link between the salvific mystery of the new creature and the familial condition of human affection, accompany you and protect you. I bless you from my heart, and – as usual, because the Pope is a beggar – I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!
