



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL JOHN PAUL II INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
ON THE XXVth ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION**

*Hall of Blessings
Thursday, 11 May 2006*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I meet you today with great joy on this 25th anniversary of the foundation of the *Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* at the Pontifical Lateran University. I greet you all with affection and I thank you for the great affection that I have encountered. I warmly thank Mons. Livio Melina for his kind words and also for his briefness. We will be able to read what he wished to say, while more time will be left for friendly exchanges.

The beginning of your Institute is connected with a singular event: on that day, 13 May 1981, my beloved Predecessor John Paul II suffered the well-known serious attack on his life during the Audience at which he was to have announced the creation of your Institute.

This event has special importance at this commemoration, which we are celebrating a little more than a year after his death. You have wished to emphasize it with the fitting initiative of a Congress on *The legacy of John Paul II on marriage and family: loving human love*.

You rightly feel that this legacy of yours is very special, since the vision that is one of the structural centres of his mission and reflections was addressed to you and you are its perpetuators: God's plan for marriage and the family.

This bequest is not merely a collection of doctrines or ideas but first and foremost a teaching

endowed with enlightening unity on the meaning of human love and life. The presence of numerous families at this Audience - therefore not only the students of the present and the past but above all the students of the future - is a particularly eloquent testimony of how the teaching of this truth has been received and has born fruit.

As a young priest, Karol Wojty³a already had the idea of "teaching how to love". It was later to fill him with enthusiasm when, as a young Bishop, he confronted the difficult times that followed the publication of my Predecessor Paul VI's prophetic and ever timely Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

It was then that he realized the need for a systematic study of this topic. It was the basis of this teaching which he later offered to the entire Church in his unforgettable *Catechesis on human love*.

Thus, *two* fundamental *elements* were highlighted that in recent years you have sought to examine more deeply and that give novelty to your Institute as an academic reality with a specific mission in the Church.

The *first element* concerns the fact that marriage and the family are rooted in the inmost nucleus of the truth about man and his destiny. Sacred Scripture reveals that the vocation to love is part of the authentic image of God which the Creator has desired to impress upon his creature, calling them to resemble him precisely to the extent in which they are open to love.

Consequently, the sexual difference that distinguishes the male from the female body is not a mere biological factor but has a far deeper significance. It expresses that form of love with which man and woman, by becoming one flesh, as Sacred Scripture says, can achieve an authentic communion of people open to the transmission of life and who thus cooperate with God in the procreation of new human beings.

A *second element* marks the newness of John Paul II's teaching on human love: his original way of interpreting God's plan precisely in the convergence of divine revelation with the human experience. Indeed, in Christ, fullness of the revelation of the Father's love, is also expressed the full truth of the human vocation to love that can only be found completely in the sincere gift of self.

In my recent Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, I wanted to emphasize that it is precisely through love that "the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny" ([n. 1](#)) shines forth.

In other words, God used the way of love to reveal the intimate mystery of his Trinitarian life. Furthermore, the close relationship that exists between the image of God-Love and human love enables us to understand that: "Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the

measure of human love" (n. 11).

It is here that the duty incumbent on the Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in academic structures overall stands out: to illumine the truth of love as a path to fullness in every form of human life. The great challenge of the new evangelization that John Paul II proposed with such enthusiasm needs to be sustained with a truly profound reflection on human love, since precisely this love is the privileged path that God chose to reveal himself to man and in this love he calls human beings to communion in the Trinitarian life.

This approach enables us also to overcome a private conception of love that is so widespread today. Authentic love is transformed into a light that guides the whole of life towards its fullness, generating a society in which human beings can live. The communion of life and love which is marriage thus emerges as an authentic good for society.

Today, the need to avoid confusing marriage with other types of unions based on weak love is especially urgent. It is only the rock of total, irrevocable love between a man and a woman that can serve as the foundation on which to build a society that will become a home for all mankind.

The importance of the Institute's work in the Church's mission explains its structure: in fact, John Paul II approved a single Institute but with different headquarters located on the five continents, for the purpose of offering a reflection that would display the riches of the one truth in the plurality of cultures.

This unity of vision in research and teaching, embracing the diversity of places and sensibilities, constitutes a value which you must safeguard, developing the riches embedded in each culture. This feature of the Institute has proven to be particularly suited to the study of a reality such as that of the marriage and family. Your work can express how the gift of creation lived in the different cultures was raised to a redeeming grace by Christ's redemption.

To be successful in your mission as the faithful heirs of the Institute's Founder, beloved John Paul II, I ask you to look to Mary Most Holy, Mother of Fair Love. The redeeming love of the Incarnate Word must be transformed into "fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 42), for every marriage and in every family.

I offer you all, dear teachers, students of today and yesterday and the staff in charge, as well as all the families who look up to your Institute, my most cordial good wishes, which I accompany with a special Apostolic Blessing.

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