



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD MEETING
OF THE RETROUVAILLE MOVEMENT***

Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Friday, 26 September 2008

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

I welcome you with joy today, on the occasion of the world meeting of the *Retrouvaille* Movement. I greet you all, married couples and priests, along with the international leaders of this association, which has worked with great dedication at the service of couples in difficulty for more than 30 years. I greet in particular Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and thank him for his courteous words, as well as for describing your Movement's goals to me.

I am impressed, dear friends, by your experience that brings you into contact with families marked by a marital crisis. In reflecting on your activity, once again I recognized God's "finger", that is, the action of the Holy Spirit who generates in the Church adequate responses to the needs and emergencies of every epoch. Of course, in our day, a very deeply felt emergency is that of separations and divorces. Thus, the insight of the Canadian couple Guy and Jeannine Beland in 1977 was providential, to help couples face serious crises with a special programme geared to rebuilding their relationship - not as an alternative to psychotherapy but through a distinct and complementary process. You are not in fact professionals; you are married couples, many of whom have personally lived through the same difficulties, have overcome them with God's grace and the support of *Retrouvaille* and in turn have felt the desire to joyfully place your own experience at the service of others. There are various priests among you who guide couples on their way, breaking open the Word and the Bread of life for them. "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt 10: 8): you refer constantly to these words, which Jesus addressed to his

disciples.

As your experience shows, a marital crisis - here we are speaking of serious and grave crises - constitutes a two-sided reality. One side of it, especially in its acute and more painful phase, presents itself as a failure, as the proof that the dream is over or has become a nightmare and that, unfortunately, "there is nothing left to be done". This is the negative side. There is another side, however, often unknown to us but that God sees. Every crisis, in fact - nature teaches us this - is a passage that leads to a new stage of life. Yet, if this happens automatically in inferior creatures, in the human being it involves freedom, the will, and therefore a "hope that is greater" than desperation. In the darkest moments, the spouses have lost hope. It is then that they are in need of others who preserve it, of a "we", of the company of true friends who, with the greatest respect and a sincere desire for good, are prepared to share a little of their own hope with those who have lost it - not in a sentimental or overly ambitious way, but in an organized and realistic one. Thus, at the moment of the break, you become for the couple the real possibility of having a positive reference, whom they can trust in their despair. In fact, when their relationship disintegrates, the husband and wife are plunged into loneliness, both individually and as a couple. They lose sight of the horizon of communion with God, with others and with the Church. It is then that your meetings offer them a "foothold" so as not to lose everything and to gradually get back on their feet. I like to think of you as custodians of a greater hope for married couples who have lost it.

Hence a crisis is a passage of growth. The account of the wedding feast at Cana can be interpreted from this perspective (Jn 2: 1-11). The Virgin Mary realizes that the husband and wife "have no wine" and tells Jesus. This lack of wine brings to mind the moment in a couple's life when love ends, joy runs out and the enthusiasm of the marriage suddenly drains away. After Jesus had transformed the water into wine, the bridegroom received compliments because, they said, he had kept "the good wine" until that moment. This implies that Jesus' wine was better than the previous. We know that this "good wine" is a symbol of salvation, of the new nuptial covenant that Jesus came to make with humanity. Yet every Christian marriage, even the most wretched and insecure one, is a sacrament of precisely this and therefore can find in humility the courage to ask the Lord for help. When a husband and wife in difficulty or - as your experience shows - even already separated entrust themselves to Mary and turn to the One who made "one flesh" of two, they can be certain that, with the Lord's help, this crisis will become a passage of growth and that love will emerge from it purified, matured and strengthened. God alone can do this. He wants his disciples to serve as effective collaborators, to approach couples, listen to them and help them rediscover the hidden treasure of their marriage, the flame that has been buried under the ashes. It is he who revives this flame and brings it back to life; certainly not in the same way as falling in love, but in a different, more intense and profound manner; but it is always the same flame.

Dear friends, who have chosen to put yourselves at the service of others in such a delicate area, I assure you of my prayers that your commitment will not become merely an activity, but will remain

always, at its roots, a witness of God's love. Yours is a service "against the tide". Today, in fact, when couples enter a crisis, they find many people ready to advise separation. Divorce is often proposed with ease even to spouses who are married in the Name of the Lord, in the forgetfulness that man can not divide what God has united (cf. Mt 19: 6; Mk 10: 9). In order to carry out your mission you too need to nourish your spiritual life constantly, to put love into all that you do so that, when you encounter difficult situations, your hope will never run out or be reduced to a formula. May the Holy Family of Nazareth, to whom I entrust your service, especially the most difficult cases, help you in this delicate apostolic task. May Mary, Queen of the Family, be beside you, as I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you and to all of the members of the *Retrouvaille* Movement.

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