

Message to the Academic Community of the John Paul II Institute

Dear Friends,

At this moment that I receive the Holy Father's nomination as President of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, I wish to share with you the sentiments of my heart.

First of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, for this gesture, by which he demonstrates his very particular attention to our Institute. His decision to nominate a President different from the Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University, where the Institute's Central Section has been established, was probably motivated by the circumstance of the Institute's current growth and diffusion in the world. In accord with our constitution and statutes, we will cordially remain within the ambit of the Lateran University, which, by a special title, is the Pope's University. At the same time, the Institute's original and specific characteristics will now emerge even more distinctly and with them the importance that our academic mission has in the eyes of the Pope and the hope that the Church places in the Institute at this particular moment. In August 1999 John Paul II explained to us that the Institute presented a unique reality among ecclesiastical academic institutions, insofar as, due to its specific organization, it expresses a unity in pluriformity. At this point I would also like to thank His Excellency Msgr. Rino Fisichella, who has led our Institute over these past four years and who has been reappointed Rector of the Lateran University. I am certain that also within these new parameters, willed by the Holy Father, our relationship will be one of a fruitful and cordial collaboration.

To my mind, we can see in the Pope's decision, precisely in the year in which we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our foundation, a mandate of particular significance. It almost appears to indicate a new step on our way. New and tremendous challenges, which are ever more pervasive on a global level in our societies, threaten marriage and the family on the part of the dominant cultural context. At the same time, the Church becomes ever more aware of the fact that the family is a unique resource for evangelization: she is "*gaudium et spes*." Twenty-five years ago, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul II affirmed that "the future of humanity

passes by way of the family” (n. 86). Founding the Institute, he entrusted to our academic community the task of investigating scientifically and of communicating convincingly the truth about human love that is essential for the life of every man and woman and for the future of human society as such. In our 25th year, we are called to renew our full and ardent faithfulness to the mandate we have received, investing with renewed vigor and commitment the rich heritage that has matured over these years: in scientific research, in teaching and formation, in the spread of the Institute into different countries and cultural areas.

There are great events and ambitious projects awaiting us in the coming months, beginning with next May’s Congress: “Loving Human Love. The Heritage of John Paul II on Marriage and the Family,” which will be followed by the International Council of the Institute. This will be an extraordinary occasion for us to meet in the light of the inspiration that constitutes our very identity, enabling us to verify the fundamental lines of a common “project of research and teaching,” and opening us to the needs of other cultural areas. For August 2007 there is already planned an International Study Week, which will involve the professors of our academic community.

In the face of both the greatness of the undertaking and the trust shown to me by this nomination, I feel serene: certainly I am conscious of the grave responsibility and of my own limits, but I am also filled with confidence. First of all, I have confidence in Our Lady of Fatima, under whose protection it has pleased our Founder to place us, and then in the intercession of the Servant of God John Paul II, who “from the window of heaven sees us and blesses us.” Besides, I feel supported by the legacy of the Presidents that have preceded me and who will not fail me with their counsel and help: His Excellency Msgr. Carlo Caffarra, whose disciple I consider myself and who has been my *Doktorvater*; His Eminence Angelo Scola, who honors me with his paternal friendship; His Excellency Msgr. Rino Fisichella, the leader of these more recent years. I trust, finally, in the prayer and concrete support of the academic community as a whole, and I shall remain at the disposition of each and everyone for the effective realization of our common mission.

I am connected to the Institute from its very beginning, and it is with emotion that I remember the first unforgettable lessons of Carlo Caffarra, Stanislaw Grygiel, Angelo Scola; in particular I remember the extraordinary circumstances of my doctorate, which was the first one discussed at the

Institute, with the presence of the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with whom I had in the meantime begun to work. The great peace that sustains me now is based, in a particular way, on the fact of having experienced in the day to day life of the Institute the very thing that is taught in the courses: the *communio personarum* of faculty, students, and staff, in the passionate quest for truth.

Livio Melina