

October 27, 2016
Sala Clementina
Vatican City

Archbishop Paglia,
Monsignor Sequeri,
Esteemed Professors,
Dear Students,

I am especially pleased to inaugurate, together with you, the new Academic Year of our Saint John Paul II Pontifical Institute, an event that happily coincides with the Institute's Thirty-Fifth Anniversary. My thanks for their kind greetings go to our Grand Chancellor, Archbishop Paglia, and to our President, Monsignor Sequeri, and my gratitude goes as well to all those who have been responsible for the Institute these past thirty-five years.

1. The fruitfulness and value of the far-sighted intuition of my revered Predecessor, Saint John Paul II, whose support for this institute was constant, can be recognized and appreciated ever more clearly today. His wise discernment of the "signs of the times" has enabled us to refocus, in the Church, and in society as a whole, our attention on the depth and sensitivity of the relationship that springs from the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. The Institute's development across five continents is witness to the validity and the relevance of the programs that reflect the "catholicity" of its mission. The vitality of our undertaking, which has become widely known and respected, gives us hope for the development of new dialogue and exchanges with other academic institutions, including those that reflect belief systems and cultures different from ours, that are active like us in this very sensitive and developing field of study.

2. In today's atmosphere of crisis, marital bonds and family ties are put to the test in many ways. The appearance of a culture that glorifies narcissistic individualism, the idea that freedom can be unhinged from our responsibility for one another, growing indifference to the common good, the imposition of ideologies that directly attack the traditional family, together with poverty that threatens the future of so many families—all these are reasons why families are in crisis today. As well, we are facing the many questions that arise out of newly developed technologies that make possible courses of action that are in conflict with authentic human dignity. The complexity of these new developments makes advisable a much closer relationship between the Saint John Paul II Institute and the Pontifical Academy for Life. I urge you to face these new and delicate questions with the courage that is necessary and without yielding to the temptation to whitewash them, to sweeten them, to tone them down a little or even to "tame" them. (Letter to the Grand Chancellor of the Argentinian Pontifical Catholic University, March 3, 2015)

The uncertainty and disorientation that affect fundamental human feelings destabilize family and social relationships, leading "me" to prevail over "us" and the individual over society. This is a situation that goes against God's plan, the plan that has entrusted the world and history to the covenant between man and woman (Gn 1:28-31). By its very nature, this covenant calls for cooperation and respect, generous commitment and shared responsibility, and the ability to recognize difference as being richness and promise, not a justification for subjugation and abuse.

Understanding the human dignity of man and woman requires a proper appreciation of the relationship between the two. How can we know fully our own concrete humanity other than through an appreciation of the complementary difference between ourselves, man or woman, and the other sex? And that full knowledge is reached as man and woman speak to each other, question each other and act together, with mutual respect and good will. It is impossible to deny the contribution that modern culture has made to the rediscovery of the difference between the sexes. For this reason, it is very troubling that this same culture appears unable to get beyond a tendency to eliminate difference rather than addressing the problems that threaten it.

Only in the cradle of the family can the natural covenant between man and woman be first nourished. And this covenant, strengthened by Grace from God our Creator and Savior, is meant to be lived out in all the many aspects of their relationship as it integrates with their social and community ties. The intimate correlation between roles in the family and the social manifestations of this covenant—in the world of work, of thought, the economy and politics, in the care for life and in the relationship between generations—is manifest worldwide. We see that when all is well between man and woman, all is also well in the world and in history. If not, the world becomes unwelcoming and history grinds to a halt.

3. The witness of the thoroughgoing humanity and pure beauty of the Christian ideal of the family should inspire us to our very core. The Church communicates God's love for the family in fulfillment of its mission of love for all the families of our earth. The Church, which knows that it is a family people, sees in each family an icon of God's covenant with the whole human family. The great mystery, as Paul says (Eph. 5:32), regarding Christ and his Church is centered in the family. The love that is in the Church commits itself to the development, in doctrine and in pastoral practice, of its own ability to make understandable, to people of our own time, the truth and beauty of God's creative plan. Making this divine plan effective in all the complexity of today's world requires a special and loving understanding, as well as a complete commitment to evangelization that is animated by great compassion and mercy toward the vulnerability and weakness of human love.

What is necessary is a more enthusiastic commitment to ransoming—to the rehabilitation—of this great “invention” of God's creation. This is a serious commitment, doctrinally as well as practically, pastorally as well as in day-to-day witness. The dynamism of the relationship among God, man and woman is a golden key that unlocks the meaning of the world and of history and of all that is in them, as well as, after all, something of the depth of the love that is God Himself. Can we embrace the greatness of such a revelation? Are we convinced of the life energy that this Divine plan brings to the love that is in the world. Do we know how to keep the new generations from giving up and bring them back to the boldness of this plan?

We are all too aware that we are carrying this treasure in “vessels of clay” (*cf.* 2 Cor. 4:7). Grace exists, but so does sin, and we have to learn not to resign ourselves to human failure but rather to support the fulfillment of God's plan by every means possible. It is correct, after all, to admit that at times “we have presented a theological ideal of matrimony that is too abstract, almost artificial, far from the concrete situation of families and from what they are capable of in their day-to-day lives. This excessive idealization, particularly when we haven't reawakened any trust in grace, hasn't made matrimony more desirable and attractive, it has made it less so (AL, 36). God's justice

shines forth in His faithfulness to his promise, and the splendor of that faithfulness, as we read in Scripture, is the mercy He bestows. (cf. Rom 9:21-23).

4. The two recent synodal sessions, *cum Petro et sub Petro*, were in agreement about the need to broaden the Church's understanding of and love for the mystery of human love that reveals God's love for everyone. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* emphasizes this wider understanding of love and calls on the whole People of God to make the family dimension of the Church more visible and more effective. Families that make up the People of God and build up the Body of Christ with their love must become more aware of the gift of grace that they hold within themselves. And they must become proud of being able to put that gift at the service of all those who, poor and abandoned, despair of ever finding it, or getting it back. Pastoral discourse today isn't just about how far many Christians are from the ideal and the practice of the Christian truth about matrimony and the family. Much more important is the idea of the Church's "closeness"—closeness to new generations of married couples in making the Church's blessing of the matrimonial and family ever more central to their lives, and in helping them confront human weakness so that grace can deliver, give new life and heal. The unbreakable bond between the Church and its sons and daughters is the clearest witness we have of God's faithful and merciful love.

5. The new structure of this commitment calls confidently, and in a very special way, on your Institute, whose task it is to support the necessary openness of intelligence formed by faith in the service of the pastoral mission of Peter's Successor. The fruitfulness of your research and study for the benefit of the whole Church will require the full commitment of your minds and hearts. Don't forget that "skilled theologians, no less than good and kindly pastors, take on the scents and aromas of the people and the street, and their reflections are like oil and wine poured out on peoples' wounds and hurts." (March 3, 2015) Theology and pastoral care go hand in hand. Theological doctrine that doesn't let itself be directed and formed by its evangelizing purpose and by the Church's pastoral concerns is no less unthinkable than pastoral activity that doesn't know how to use revelation and tradition to better understand the Faith and preach it as Jesus commands.

The Church's mission must be rooted in the happiness that faith brings and in the humility that marks joyful service to the Church. The Church that *is*, not imaginary churches that we think should be. The living Church in which we live, the beautiful Church to which we belong, the Church of the one Lord and one Spirit to which we commit ourselves as servants who are "worthless" (Lk 17:10) but who offer their best to the Lord, the Church that we love so that all can love it, the Church in which we feel ourselves loved more than we deserve, and for which we are ready to sacrifice with perfect happiness!

God be with us on this path of communion as we travel it together, and God bless now and in the future the generosity that makes you ready to sow the fertile field I have entrusted to you.

Thank you.