

"Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage:
Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage
at a Time When Sex, Love, Marriage and Family are in Crisis"

- Introduction

- Thanks, Chris, for your very kind introduction.
- It's great to be back at Portsmouth Institute here on the beautiful campus of Portsmouth Abbey.
- I'm deeply honored to have been asked to return from the land of the Yankees and Mets to Red Sox Nation and play the role of Mookie Betts, batting leadoff in our conference on How the Christian Family Can Renew Culture, especially knowing the heavy hitters that are coming behind me tomorrow...
- Even though I have done many Legatus events and spoken at the banquets of various conferences, I generally don't like speaking at dinner, when I'm often going head-to-head with dessert, trying to out-compete the insulin spike, the parasympathetic nervous system and the effect of long, tiring days on attendees, not to mention speaking over the occasional noise and distractions that occur when cleaning the tables so that the hard working banquet staff can get home.
- But tonight's an exception. I'm pretty excited to be speaking during dinner, because it's a good starting point for our focus on the family and culture.
- A half-hour journey up Route 24 from here is Stonehill College, where the Servant of God, and we pray soon Blessed Father Patrick Peyton, is buried. During his Rosary Crusades he made famous the expression, "The Family that Prays Together, Stays Together," which St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. John Paul II often repeated. The evidence shows, however, that the family that *eats* together stays together as well — and is much healthier, not only in terms of nutrition but in on so many other important indices.
- There are huge differences between families that eat together five times a week or more and those who eat together two times a week or fewer. Children growing up in families that do not eat together are twice as likely to take drugs, to say they're bored, to be truant from school, and to underperform when they show up. They're forty percent more likely to be overweight or experience eating disorders. They also have much higher rates of teenage pregnancy, depression and self-esteem issues. On the other hand, studies show that family dinner conversation is a more powerful vocabulary booster than reading, that it builds communication skills and family solidarity.
- Yet despite the overwhelming evidence of the importance of eating together to strengthen the family, there has been a huge drop in the percentage of families that eat together five times a week or more. There are lots of reasons for this. Almost four out of five women today with children between 6-17 work outside the home, and whether they're married or single-moms, there is understandably not a lot of time left over for them to shop and cook, something similar for most working dads. Kids have more extra-curricular activities and those extra-curriculars take place no longer just after school, but also in the evenings. Many families eat on the run and many new homes no longer even have dining rooms, and, when they do, use them.
- It doesn't have to be this way. To change these trends, however, requires families to live by a different set of priorities, a different ordinal rank of what they value most. In American culture, we in general don't place much worth in eating, not to mention eating together. Many of us treat food like we do fueling up our vehicles. We might prefer higher octane, whether in terms of taste or nutritional value, but we look at eating fundamentally as an activity to do as fast as we can so that we can then move on to something more important, whether that's work, or study, or chores, hobbies or entertainment. That's not the way it is everywhere. In many cultures, like Italy and Portugal where I've spent several years, eating together is almost a sacred activity. It's a time for growing in communion and community, for sharing each other's journey. It's a time to say that the family is

more important than productivity at work or homework, and a time to find enjoyment in each other's company — literally, *com-panis*, sharing bread together — rather than on television, our devices, or other diversions.

- Why is it that fewer families are making this choice to eat together as a family? One of the reasons is that not enough families prioritize the family meal, and the reason for that, I think, is because many families just haven't been sufficiently prioritizing the family, or, more specifically, have not been prioritizing the family over the other things that compete for its time. A second reason, I think, is because of the impact that our individualistic, secularist, hypercompetitive, fast-paced, distracted, culture is having on the choices made by parents and families. Most families — and almost all of the members of the family, except teens — would love to have more time together, but they sacrifice family time and meals for the sake of other things that, at a practical level, they make more important, like giving their child the best possible chance to get into the top universities, or earn scholarships, or make the majors, or gain C-level positions in Fortune 500 companies — or making the money required to pay to try to make those big dreams happen. They don't invest enough of their time and resources in the family itself because their goals are often geared toward the individual desires and success of the family members rather than the strength of the whole as a true source of good for all of them.
- I start with this examination of families' eating together because I believe that what's happening with family meals is happening with families in general, and what's happening with families, is similarly occurring to Catholic families. Family members are just not prioritizing the family enough, sacrificing the good of family life in favor of various other goals that our culture pretends are must haves. A big part of the strengthening of the family will begin when families begin to treat themselves, and their time together, as important, as sacred, as key to their happiness and flourishing. There are undeniably many external pressures on the family, financial, cultural, and social. But perhaps the biggest challenge for the family today comes from within, from the choices the family itself makes as to how life will be ordered. If the family gives into the centrifugal forces of modern life and each of the members of the family goes in various disparate directions, the family will obviously be weakened, and many harmful things for the individual family members and for society will flow from that dissolution, as we have been seeing in recent generations. But if the family makes the courageous choice to prioritize its good, and to sacrifice many other goods for the sake of something better and more important, then it can grow in the capacity to resist those centrifugal forces, and one family at a time start to influence our culture anew.
- Tonight's theme
 - Tonight I've been asked to talk about the sources of hope for the Christian family today. The greatest definition of hope I think comes from St. Paul, but he gives it implicitly as the flip side of the coin of despair. He wrote to the Ephesians about those who once were “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). As Pope Benedict picked up in his 2007 encyclical, *Saved in Hope*, if to be without hope is to be without God in the world, then to live with hope is to live with God in the world. God is the source of our hope. Whenever we recognize he is with us, we are able to have hope even in the most seemingly desperate of situations.
 - For that reason, I've entitled tonight's talk, “Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage at a Time When Sex, Love, Marriage and Family are in Crisis.” What I want to argue is that we should all have great hope for Christian marriage because the Risen Lord Jesus is still very much alive and he comes with all of his grace and power into Christian sacramental marriages. The sacrament of marriage, like any sacrament, is as St. John Paul II once said, “a sign and means of intimate communion with God.” Christ intimately unites himself in a covenant with a Christian man and woman who give themselves to each other and to him until death for better, healthier and richer, and for worse, sicker, poorer. The question is whether couples are cooperating with that saving work of Christ in them, and through them, in the world. The Sacramentality of Marriage is a Gospel, but are couples hearing that Gospel, living it and proclaiming it? Are they receiving, opening and using God's gifts or sacrificing or neglecting them? Are they treating Christ's presence the way that many families treat family meals — as a wish or a luxury — rather than as something truly fundamental? And regardless of how they've done until

now, how can couples today learn to cooperate more fully with Christ's sacramental presence in the marriage so that they can become what Christ calls them to be, salt, light and leaven for each other and for the world?

- What I'd like to do tonight is to talk about the great news of the sacramentality of Christian marriage and specifically to focus on how Christ is present in the couple and the family, seeking to heal many of the ills families face and strengthen them against the struggles families need to endure. I'd like to ask whether many of the problems families are having are flowing from not prioritizing sufficiently this reality of Christ's saving work in their home. I'd like to sketch a little what happens when a family unleashes the power of the sacrament within. And I'd like to finish with some words about how this sacramental renewal of marriage and the family is the building block for the renewal of culture, civilization, and the Church.
- The problems
 - Before I get there, though, I'd think it's important to start with the reality and magnitude of the problems that families and our culture are facing today. They're legion. They're formidable. At a human level, they're frightening. Off the top of my head, I put together a list of about thirty:
 - A failure on the part of many to believe in the indissolubility of marriage.
 - Growing rates of marital breakdown and divorce and the consequences this has on women, men and children. In some places, broken families are becoming the norm rather than an exception, and many children say they feel that they're orphans of living parents. Many are consequently entering relationships with much heavier baggage than yesteryear.
 - Declining marriage rates and the increase of cohabitation as a long-term substitute.
 - The explosion of pornography and the denigration of women, sex, and love. This has led to generations of objectified women and girls and a generation of men wounded in their capacity for sacrificial love.
 - The prevalence of a hook-up or Tinder culture instead of a dating culture. Many don't know how to date any longer, as the recent movie *The Dating Project* highlights.
 - The difficulty for many, especially young women, to find eligible men. One author likened present generations of young men to what happened in Belgium after World War I, when a whole generation of marriageable boys was wiped out leaving girls with the vocation to marry with no one to espouse. Young men today are living casualties, she argued, of the sexual revolution.
 - The move to redefine marriage from the union of one man and one woman, faithfully committed to each other for life and open to children, to a union of any two adults for as long as they want. If marriage means anything a majority of justices says it means, does it really mean anything, people ask? Is it really special?
 - A culture —television, public education — that doesn't support raising a family.
 - Gender confusion and gender ideology, undermining respect for both women and men. Human identity is now considered by many to be unstable and malleable, a mental state chosen by the individual that can change over time. This obviously impacts how people look to the institution of one man and one woman called marriage.
 - The ongoing scourge of domestic violence
 - Drug use, alcoholism, gambling and other addictions — like to traditional or social media.
 - A crisis of trust and infidelity, some coming from family of origin issues, some coming the much higher rates of adultery being facilitated by various social media apps.
 - A much greater difficulty in forgiving as a result. Question 142 on the FOCCUS test given to engaged couples over the last two decades. 95 percent have at least one of the two answer "I agree" to the statement, "If my future spouse is ever unfaithful to me, under no circumstances would I reconcile" (a pre-condition that would obviously invalidate any wedding, because then one wouldn't really be vowing to remain married to the other ... for worse... until death).
 - An extreme individualism that weakens family bonds. Many members of the family feel quasi-independent, obsessed with free time. This leads to a a terrible loneliness for so many,

despite having friends, followers, acquaintance, hook-ups and even family members. There's also a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one's personal goals.

- A hedonism or pleasure-seeking that leads spouses to think that, when one or both no longer feels fulfilled, sufficient reason exists to end the marriage.
- A narcissism, or extreme self-centeredness, that makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs.
- A growing materialism that leads us to treat others and relationships the way we treat things, as disposable things that we can just discard. There's a consumerism even in the home.
- A culture of the ephemeral and fears about permanent commitments.
- The technological revolution in the field of human procreation, which has dramatically impacted conjugal relations, both in terms of contraception on the one hand — separating love-making from life-making — and *in vitro* fertilization on the other, which separates life-making from love-making. This has deeply impacted the interior culture of the couple, allowing them to try to dominate and control the gift of human procreation, something that has let them to dominate, control or use each other, or each other's gametes, according to their own wishes.
- There's the confusion and abuse of surrogacy that has flowed from these immoral reproductive technologies.
- There's a crisis with regard to hope in the future shown in decreasing total fertility rates. The total fertility rate in the US is now 1.76 births per woman, down from 2.08 a decade ago.
- There's the scourge of present and past abortions. This not only impacts present relationships but the abortion culture promote attitudes of conditional love toward children, separating them into categories of wanted and unwanted, with many cultural ramifications.
- There's a confusion of genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and as if everything were possible and permissible. This can lead to a rejection of moral norms, of chastity, and of real meaning to love.
- There's greater immaturity, with kids remaining kids long into adulthood Surrogate motherhood
- There is the problem with the social engineering of adoption agencies and insufficient foster care.
- There's the cost of weddings.
- There are, very practically, lots of larger issues, from endemic poverty, to lack of dignified and affordable homes, to the difficulties women and families have mixing work and family life, to the mobile aspect of culture, not to mention the millions of families on the move as refugees and forced and economic migrants.
- To summarize this section, I'd like to turn to St. John Paul II, who in his Letter to Family in 1994, sought to identify the root of many of the problems. He said that many of them flow from a modern rationalism that fails to appreciate mystery, that simply doesn't acknowledge a sacramental vision or way of living, that doesn't acknowledge as truth anything that cannot be empirically verified. As a result they don't admit God's existence and care for married life. Listen to the words of the saint whom one day I hope will be named a Doctor of the Church with the specific title of Doctor of Human Love in the Divine Plan.
- St. John Paul II said, in paragraphs 19 and 20 of his Letter to Families: "Modern rationalism 'does not tolerate mystery.' It does not accept the mystery of man as male and female, nor is it willing to admit that the full truth about man has been revealed in Jesus Christ. In particular, it does not accept the 'great mystery' proclaimed in the Letter to the Ephesians, but radically opposes it. It may well acknowledge, in the context of a vague deism, the possibility and even the need for a supreme or divine Being, but it firmly rejects the idea of a God who became man in order to save man. For rationalism it is unthinkable that God should be the Redeemer, much less that he should be 'the Bridegroom,' the primordial and

unique source of the human love between spouses. Rationalism provides a radically different way of looking at creation and the meaning of human existence. But once man begins to lose sight of a God who loves him, a God who calls man through Christ to live in him and with him, and once the family no longer has the possibility of sharing in the ‘great mystery,’ what is left except the mere ‘temporal dimension of life?’ Earthly life becomes nothing more than the scenario of a battle for existence, of a desperate search for gain, and financial gain before all else. ... This kind of critical reflection should lead our society, which certainly contains many positive aspects on the material and cultural level, to realize that, from various points of view, it is a “*society that is sick*” and is creating profound distortions in man. ... The reason is that our society has broken away from the full truth about man, from the truth about what man and woman really are as persons. Thus it cannot adequately comprehend the real meaning of the gift of persons in marriage, responsible love at the service of fatherhood and motherhood, and the true grandeur of procreation and education. ... This is the real drama: the modern means of social communication are tempted to manipulate the message, ‘thereby falsifying the truth about man.’ [This is real fake news!] Human beings are not the same thing as the images proposed in advertising and shown by the modern mass media. They are much more, in their physical and psychic unity, as composites of soul and body, as persons. They are much more because of their vocation to love, which introduces them as male and female into the realm of the ‘great mystery.’”

- The problems flow, he says, from a rationalistic worldview that lives without hope, without God in the world. We might say that they are the problems that flow from secularism, from living *etsi Deus non daretur*, as if God does not exist. It’s a practical atheism, whether or not one acknowledges that God exists. Many of the problems, he says, flows from acknowledging, not to mention not living, with a sacramental awareness of God’s presence in the midst of human life in general and human love, marriage, sexuality and family in particular. That’s the root of what needs to be addressed beyond treating the various symptoms.
- Before we move on, I would just like to add that even though various aspects of these problems are new, existential challenges for the family are not. We see at the beginning of time, with the first family, how the devil sought to insinuate himself within their bond, getting them to distrust God, to disobey his voice, and ultimately led them to hide themselves from him and from each other. Sin metastasized quickly and passed to their children, as Cain killed his brother Abel. There was jealousy between Abraham’s sons Isaac and Ishmael, enmity between Isaac’s sons Jacob and Esau, envy between Jacob’s 12 sons, ten of whom ganged up to try to kill their brother Joseph. There was deadly jealousy in David’s family. The list goes on and on. Simply put, over time, the family, which God had created the family in his own image and likeness, had become a mess. As the human family “increased and multiplied,” so did sin and the divisions, and pain, and death that flow from sin. So while we can say that there’s plenty of bad news for marriage and the family today, we know that there’s bad news almost from the beginning. But even combining all of the bad news together, there’s a good news that’s far more powerful. That brings us to the heart of the talk.
- Jesus: The Redeemer of the Family
 - When the Son of God became man, when the Word became flesh, he became flesh as a little child within a family. That was a divine choice, for Jesus did not have to come into our world in that way. He could have come as a 33 year-old adult and immediately begun to preach. He could have come as a teenager or as an 80 year-old. But he was conceived and began his existence as a one-cell human zygote in Mary’s womb, progressed to a blastocyst, then an embryo, then a fetus until finally he was born as a baby in a family. Why did he choose to do this? He didn’t tell us the reason, but we don’t need to be great theologians to see why it made sense: He wanted to redeem all of human life, which meant redeeming the family.
 - All of existence is meant to be familial. St. John Paul II used to call the Blessed Trinity a family, because it is a structured communion of persons in love, with a Father, a Son and the love between them. The human person was made in the image and likeness of God, “male and female he made them” (Gen 1:27-28), and hence the image of God is familial: a husband and a wife can love each so

much that, like the Trinity, their love can generate a third person. They can literally “make love” and then name, raise and live in joyful communion with the love they’ve made.

- Pope Francis focused on this reality in his 2017 exhortation *The Joy of Love*. In one of the most beautiful sections of that exhortation he wrote, “Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself, *restored marriage and the family to their original form*. Marriage and the family have been *redeemed by Christ and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity*, the mystery from which all true love flows. The spousal covenant, originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation, takes on its full meaning in Christ and his Church. Through his Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to bear witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion. The Gospel of the family spans the history of the world, from the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God, to the fulfillment of the mystery of the covenant in Christ at the end of time with the marriage of the Lamb” (AL 63). He went on to say, “The incarnation of the Word in a human family, in Nazareth, by its very newness *changed the history of the world*. We need to enter into the mystery of Jesus’ birth, into that ‘yes’ given by Mary to the message of the angel, when the Word was conceived in her womb, as well as the ‘yes’ of Joseph, who gave a name to Jesus and watched over Mary” (AL 65).
- He stresses that Jesus changed history through his incarnation in a human family in order to restore marriage and family to its original form, to the image of the Trinity. But to this restoration project we, like the Holy Family of Mary and Joseph, need to say yes to this mystery.
- Pope Francis similarly comments on what Christ did for the family during his earthly life. “He began his public ministry,” he wrote, “with the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana. He shared in everyday moments of friendship with the family of Lazarus and his sisters and with the family of Peter. He sympathized with grieving parents and restored their children to life” (AL 64). The same Jesus wants to do this with other families, with our families.
- Jesus raised the water of marriage instituted in the beginning to the wine of a sacrament, of a continuous encounter with him that leads to joy. We’re called to cooperate with that gift like the servants in Cana. They had to go to the well of Cana to get water to fill up the six 30 gallon water jars. Even if they had two gallon containers, it would take ten servants nine trips a piece, and yet they filled the jars to the brim. That’s the type of cooperation. We can also see Jesus’ generosity. 180 gallons of wine is the equivalent of 912 750-milliliter bottles of wine, enough to last quite a long time in a marriage.
- We see the power of Christ’s restorative work within the family from what has happened over the centuries when Christians have lived their marriages in a sacramental way. We see what’s happened when they’ve taken seriously what St. Paul wrote about Christian sacramental marriage to the Ephesians (Eph 5:21-33), that they should reverence and serve each other out of reverence for Christ, that husbands should sacrifice themselves for their wives as Christ sacrificed for the Church, that wives should love and serve their husbands as they would serve Christ, that they should seek to sanctify each other like Christ sanctified the Church through water and the word. St. Paul quoted Genesis, “For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh,” and then said, “This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.” In other words, Genesis refers *first* to the union between Christ and the Church, and only then derivatively to marriage. It’s not the other way around. Sacramental marriages enter into that marriage between Christ and the Church. Because Christ will never divorce the Church, sacramental marriage is indissoluble; because Christ will never betray the Church, spouses are called to fidelity; because Christ’s bond with the Church is fruitful, leading many to rebirth, human marriage must similarly be open to life.
- When couples have said their “yes” to this plan, great transformations have happened in culture. Christians transformed the Jewish mentality of marriage more and more to what it was in the beginning. They revolutionized, over the course of three centuries, the pagan approach to marriage, converting the Romans, the Greeks and so many tribes. They continue to convert new cultures today in missionary areas, where practices like polygamy, or rape-to-marry practices, or husbands with AIDS insisting on marital relations have been prevalent. What’s happened before, over and over again, can happen anew, because the same power of the sacrament that worked in couples over

the previous 2,000 years still works today. But couples need to unleash that power. Couples, like the Holy Family, need to say yes to Jesus' work of redemption and restoration so that sacramental marriages may live out their vocation and mission according to their Trinitarian and Christian identity.

- Challenge to get people to live sacramentally.
 - The challenge is to get people to do so.
 - St. John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio*, his famous 1981 exhortation on marriage, “The situation in which the family finds itself presents positive and negative aspects: The first is a sign of the salvation of Christ operating in the world; the second, a sign of the refusal that man gives to the love of God.” Christ’s salvation is operating in the world, but are we receiving or refusing the outpouring of his saving love?
 - Pope Francis writes about the impact of Christ’s saving love in *The Joy of Love* (72-73), “The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses. ... *The sacrament is not a “thing” or a “power,” for in it Christ himself “now encounters Christian spouses... He dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens.*” Christian marriage is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, *yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses.* ... Even though the analogy between the human couple of husband and wife, and that of Christ and his Church, is “imperfect,” it inspires us to beg the Lord to bestow on every married couple an outpouring of his divine love.”
 - When I prepare couples for marriage, I give them 12 essays to write, so that I can get to know them better, meet them where they’re at and try to guide them to where the Church wants them on their wedding day. The questions are pretty basic: I ask them to tell me about their upbringing, their family, their studies, their jobs, major interests, hobbies and involvements. I ask them to tell me how they met, started to date realized the other was the right one and how the proposal happened. I ask them next what marriage means to them, and generally receive answers that show without any doubt the impact of changing the secular meaning of marriage has had on the understanding of young people — almost none today ever mention man or woman. I ask what role God has in their life and relationship, how they would define or describe love and distinguish marital love for other types of love. I ask them what they love about the other and how the other has shown them how special they are. I query how the other has inspired them to change for the better. I ask what lessons about love, marriage and family they learned at home growing up, good or bad, as well as about what their relationship is with the other’s family and friends, and what they’ve discovered about their future spouse from those interactions. I ask whether they love children and are planning to start a family right away after they’re married, which is the question that normally involves the most work in helping them align their desires in life to a divine, eschatological perspective.
 - But the most important question I ask is, “Why do you think Christian marriage is a sacrament? What is the purpose of a sacrament?” It’s the most important, in my opinion, because I’m convinced that getting this right, and living it, is the secret to a marriage that will lead them to open themselves up to Christ’s restoring power, to Christ’s help, to Christ’s desire through marriage to lead them to heaven. It’s the secret to evangelizing future married couples so that they can evangelize the culture, to let the seeds of the Gospel sink deeply, to help Christ become the true center of their life and love. I’m also convinced that a superficial understanding of it can also deeply impede their growth in faith, their understanding of the Church, and their progress in genuine Christ-like spousal love. Many sacramental marriages are entered into, Pope Francis said in *Amoris Laetitia*, without much living faith.
 - The answers I get from the couple are a reflection of the type of catechesis they’ve received. Many don’t have a good definition of a sacrament. Others as to why marriage would be a sacrament. Many have been taught that the sacraments are basically ceremonies that accompany stages of life. They don’t see them as life-changing encounters with Christ. So I try to help them to see that in the Sacraments Christ comes to us, he seeks to abide in us, and have us abide in him. He wants to fill us with his joy and make ours complete. He wants to give us his life and lead us to life to the full.

Because Christ's life is eternal, the ultimate purpose of every sacrament is heaven. Their mission in marriage is to help the other become a saint. Many, we know, don't feel challenged to holiness in marriage, but the purpose of marriage is the mutual sanctification of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.

- As soon as they've grasped that, we can get practical as to their role in sanctifying the other. Their need:
 - For sanctity to be a better instrument for the other's sanctification. If they can't teach others Chinese if they don't know Chinese, how can they help the other become holy unless they're minimally seeking holiness?
 - To pray together. The family that prays together stays together. The family that doesn't, often doesn't, even if they remain under the same roof. Greatest bond is what God does through prayer. Many of the couples who come to me for marriage preparation are not praying together. They may be praying individually but they haven't started praying together. Story of growing up praying the Rosary. Teams of Our Lady and praying grace.
 - To go to the Sacraments together and live a truly sacramental life.
 - Mass. Talking about it together. Living a truly Eucharistic life. This is my body given for you.
 - Confession. Helping our capacity to forgive. Encouraging each other to go frequently.
 - Baptism. Seeking to live as a temple of God. Renewing regularly their promises to reject Satan and profess their faith in deeds. White garment. Baptismal Candle. Blessing of lips and ears.
 - Confirmation. Being bold in living the faith. Cooperating with the Holy Spirit. Spreading the faith.
 - Sacred Scripture and knowing the word of God. Challenge them to read Scripture together. With 12-15 minutes a day, they'd read the entire Bible in a year. Story of Johanna.
 - The Catechism and knowing the faith. If they were to read 4 paragraphs a day, they'd read the Catechism in two years.
 - Living a moral life
 - Keeping the commandments.
 - Examples on loving God with everything, using foul language, honoring parents, keeping the Lord's day, lying, coveting, and also chaste love.
 - School of love. 1 Cor 13. Formation in these virtues.
 - Beatitudes. How do the couples help each other to live them?
 - Corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Do they live them first to each other?
 - Fraternal correction and communication: Teams of Our Lady. Duty of sitting down.
 - Portuguese couple, learning how to love.
- Returning to the Wedding Feast of Cana.
 - Are people drinking Christ's water made wine? (Cooperating with his sacramental grace)
 - Are they going dehydrated?
 - Are they in fact drinking polluted water?
 - Story of Miraculous Medal. Golden versus dull rings. So many graces wasted.
- One expression of a married couple's cooperation with Christ's sacramental work is in their one flesh union.
 - God joins a couple in one flesh when they express their consent, but they are called to ratify and reiterate that in their body language, totally accepting the other's self-gift and giving themselves to each other holding nothing back.
 - Pope Francis writes in *The Joy of Love* (AL 74): "Sexual union, lovingly experienced and sanctified by the sacrament, is in turn a path of growth in the life of grace for the couple. It is the "nuptial mystery." The meaning and value of their physical union is expressed in the words of consent, in which they accepted and offered themselves each to the other, in order

to share their lives completely. Those words give meaning to the sexual relationship and free it from ambiguity.”

- St. John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio* 11. Consequently sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. *The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving*, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: If the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally. This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. This fertility is directed to the generation of a human being, and so by its nature it surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values. For the harmonious growth of these values a persevering and unified contribution by both parents is necessary. The only "place" in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself, which only in this light manifests its true meaning. The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather, it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love that is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the creator. A person's freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative wisdom
- This is why the use of contraception can be so injurious in a marriage, because it involves a refusal to accept the other as God made the other, with the paternal meaning to his masculinity and the maternal meaning to her femininity. It's a built in rejection of the other person's God-given fertility in the very act made by God for it to be expressed. Rather than "making love" it can corrode the love that's already there. It makes pleasure, which is meant to be a fruit of love-making, intended by God, the purpose of sexual activity, and it leads to couples' using each other for pleasure, something that doesn't lead to unity either.
- The 50th Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* is an opportunity for us to focus anew on this and show the world how this is part of the Good News.
- It also brings up the more general point about the sacramentality of marriage and the procreation and education of offspring.
 - A married couple has the opportunity to share in God's creative power. There's nothing else they could ever do that is as important as this. Not ten Nobel prizes. Not 20 SuperBowl MVPs.
 - But many couples have given into a contraceptive mentality even when they're not using contraception. They look at children more as a burden than a blessing. Children are a cross, but it's a cross that forms to love.
 - When I ask couples I'm preparing whether they hope to have children right away, I generally receive the answer, "Yes, we definitely want children, but want to wait a couple of years."
 - Great that they want children.
 - I ask 'naively,' "How are you planning not to have children?," which allows me to discuss the difference between contraception and NFP.
 - But it gets me to ask about bigger questions, eternal questions, noting CS Lewis' approach that one of the devil's greatest temptations is to convince us that we always have time.

- Would your decision change if you knew that you would only be married for five years before the other died an heroic death? Three years?
 - It always changes.
 - I also ask whether it would make a difference to them entering by God's mercy into eternity with one child or two, or two or five, to praise God with them forever. They admit it does.
 - I've tell them that I've noticed many differences in bigger families.
 - Often far greater sacrifices. School of love.
 - Far less materialism
 - Far better communication and friendship
 - Much less stress from things in the middle of the world, various soccer teams, dance lessons, music lessons, etc.
 - There are clear tradeoffs. Give up some of the things that the world values. Gain some things that the world doesn't prioritize enough.
 - While leaving these decisions to them, I encourage them to be as generous as possible with the Lord who has been generous to them. And I rejoice at baptisms in the first year!
- Domestic Church
 - A key aspect of living and focusing this sacramental communion with Christ in the midst of their marital and familial life has been summed up by the Church traditionally in the phrase, "Domestic Church."
 - The phrase has a Scriptural basis, St. Paul's words in Romans, "My greetings to the Church at their house" (Priscilla, Aquila) (16:5).
 - But the real source of this expression, a domestic Church, an *ecclesiola* or a church-in-miniature, comes from St. John Chrysostom, the great early doctor of the Church and patron saint of preachers who died in Constantinople in 407. Commenting on St. Paul's letters, he started propagating the idea of "domestic church," since it performs the role of a place where sanctification of human being occurs. The Domestic Church plays a key role in our sanctification because it is the primary place where we practice coming to intimately love other persons.
 - St. John Chrysostom wrote, "The Church is, as it were, a small household, and as in a house there are children and wife and domestics and the man has rule over them all; just so in the Church there are women, children, servants. ... For indeed a house is a little Church. Thus it is possible for us by becoming good husbands and wives, to surpass all others. ... Let the man, as soon as he has risen from his bed, seek after nothing else, but how he may do and say something whereby he may render his whole house more reverent. The woman again, let her be indeed a good housekeeper; but before attending to this, let her have another more needful care, that the whole household may work the works of Heaven."
 - The Church in recent decades has really tried to promote the reality underlying this image:
 - The Second Vatican Council taught (LG 11): "The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation that is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state."
 - St. John Paul II developed it in *Familiaris Consortio* (49). "We must examine," he said, "the many profound bonds linking the church and the Christian family and establishing the family as a 'church in miniature' (*ecclesia domestica*), in such a way that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the church. ... The Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the church: By virtue of the sacrament Christian married couples and parents 'in their state and way of life have their own special gift among the people of

God. For this reason they not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to their brethren thus becoming a saving community.

- He developed the idea in his Letter to Families, saying, “The family itself is the great mystery of God. As the ‘domestic church,’ it is the ‘bride of Christ.’ The universal Church, and every particular Church in her, is most immediately revealed as the bride of Christ in the ‘domestic church’ and in its experience of love: conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, fraternal love, the love of a community of persons and of generations. Could we even imagine human love without the Bridegroom and the love with which he first loved to the end? Only if husbands and wives share in that love and in that ‘great mystery’ can they love ‘to the end.’ Unless they share in it, they do not know ‘to the end’ what love truly is and how radical are its demands.
- Pope Benedict, in a 2007 catechesis, said, “Every home is called to become a ‘domestic church’ in which family life is completely centered on the lordship of Christ and the love of husband and wife mirrors the mystery of Christ’s love for the Church, his bride.”
- The Catechism says: “The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called ‘the domestic church,’ a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity” (No. 1666).
- Pope Francis says, “The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches” (AL 87).
- What they are all combining to say is that a domestic church is not just a place, but a community where God is present, welcomed, adored, loved, spoken to and about. A domestic church is the outgrowth of living a sacramental life as a couple, of living with God in the world. Just as the ancients taught, “The Eucharist makes the Church,” so we could say, “The Sacraments make the Domestic Church.”
- Sometimes families can be structured not as domestic churches but as residences for people who happen to share genetics and last names. What’s being worshipped is really not God. The heaven is not Christian.
 - Story of Kiko Arguello, the founder of the Neocatechumenal Way. 17 year old, struggling with faith. He seemed to recognize that in his home money was worshipped, not God. What’s worshipped in our home? Is God worshipped more than sports or sitcoms or dramas? Do we worship the golden calf?
- A domestic Church is focused on the priority of holiness. That’s what defines its goals and success. To have children do better than their parents’ generation should not be thought of merely in terms of material things like money, or education, but *holiness*. Children be morally better.
- John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio* (51). “Thus the little domestic church, like the greater church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized.” It needs the Gospel more and more.
- Mission of Marriage
 - I want to finish with an application of the Sacramentality of Marriage and the Mission of Married Couples.
 - Christ still sends out disciples two by two.
 - Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 21, referring to the way many African villages were evangelized.
 - Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine.

Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. The above questions will ask, whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptized people who do not practice, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking, and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name. Other questions will arise, deeper and more demanding ones, questions evoked by this witness which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization." All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers. We are thinking especially of the responsibility incumbent on immigrants in the country that receives them.

- Need more Priscilla's and Aquila's. More Scott and Kimberly Hahn's. More Jason and Crystalina Evert's. More Louis and Zelig Martins. Church has been too clerical and as Pope Francis liked to say, many lay people were very content to allow priest and religious to do the heavy lifting of evangelization. The Church needs to recover the real balance.
 - Good news of sacramental love. Good news of chastity. Good news of marriage.
 - I'd like to summarize this talk with two thoughts from St. John Paul II from his Letter to Families.
 - The first about the importance of the family for Christ's plan for the salvation of the world: "The history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family. ... The family is placed at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, 'to unleash the forces of good,' the source of which is found in Christ the Redeemer of man." (LF 23).
 - And the second about the help God provides sacramentally to accomplish this Mission. "Married couples and families of all the world: "the Bridegroom is with you!"
- Thank you very much!