

their sins and past mistakes, and their relationship itself, before God, and to receive in turn his merciful forgiveness and healing strength.

*The preparation of the celebration*

212. Short-term preparations for marriage tend to be concentrated on invitations, clothes, the party and any number of other details that tend to drain not only the budget but energy and joy as well. The spouses come to the wedding ceremony exhausted and harried, rather than focused and ready for the great step that they are about to take. The same kind of preoccupation with a big celebration also affects certain *de facto* unions; because of the expenses involved, the couple, instead of being concerned above all with their love and solemnizing it in the presence of others, never get married. Here let me say a word to fiancés. Have the courage to be different. Don't let yourselves get swallowed up by a society of consumption and empty appearances. What is important is the love you share, strengthened and sanctified by grace. You are capable of opting for a more modest and simple celebration in which love takes precedence over everything else. Pastoral workers and the entire community can help make this priority the norm rather than the exception.

213. In their preparation for marriage, the couple should be encouraged to make the liturgical celebration a profound personal experience and

to appreciate the meaning of each of its signs. In the case of two baptized persons, the commitment expressed by the words of consent and the bodily union that consummates the marriage can only be seen as signs of the covenantal love and union between the incarnate Son of God and his Church. In the baptized, words and signs become an eloquent language of faith. The body, created with a God-given meaning, “becomes the language of the ministers of the sacrament, aware that in the conjugal pact there is expressed and realized the mystery that has its origin in God himself”.<sup>242</sup>

214. At times, the couple does not grasp the theological and spiritual import of the words of consent, which illuminate the meaning of all the signs that follow. It needs to be stressed that these words cannot be reduced to the present; they involve a totality that includes the future: “until death do us part”. The content of the words of consent makes it clear that “freedom and fidelity are not opposed to one another; rather, they are mutually supportive, both in interpersonal and social relationships. Indeed, let us consider the damage caused, in our culture of global communication, by the escalation of unkept promises... Honouring one’s word, fidelity to one’s promises: these are things that cannot be

<sup>242</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Catechesis (27 June 1984), 4: *Insegnamenti* VII/1 (1984), 1941.

bought and sold. They cannot be compelled by force or maintained without sacrifice”.<sup>243</sup>

215. The Kenyan Bishops have observed that “many [young people] concentrate on their wedding day and forget the life-long commitment they are about to enter into”.<sup>244</sup> They need to be encouraged to see the sacrament not as a single moment that then becomes a part of the past and its memories, but rather as a reality that permanently influences the whole of married life.<sup>245</sup> The procreative meaning of sexuality, the language of the body, and the signs of love shown throughout married life, all become an “uninterrupted continuity of liturgical language” and “conjugal life becomes in a certain sense liturgical”.<sup>246</sup>

216. The couple can also meditate on the biblical readings and the meaningfulness of the rings they will exchange and the other signs that are part of the rite. Nor would it be good for them to arrive at the wedding without ever having prayed together, one for the other, to seek God’s help in remaining faithful and generous,

<sup>243</sup> Catechesis (21 October 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 22 October 2015, p. 12.

<sup>244</sup> KENYA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Lenten Message* (18 February 2015).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii* (31 December 1930): AAS 22 (1930), 583.

<sup>246</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Catechesis (4 July 1984), 3, 6: *Insegnamenti* VII/2 (1984), pp. 9, 10.

to ask the Lord together what he wants of them, and to consecrate their love before an image of the Virgin Mary. Those who help prepare them for marriage should help them experience these moments of prayer that can prove so beneficial. “The marriage liturgy is a unique event, which is both a family and a community celebration. The first signs of Jesus were performed at the wedding feast of Cana. The good wine, resulting from the Lord’s miracle that brought joy to the beginning of a new family, is the new wine of Christ’s covenant with the men and women of every age... Frequently, the celebrant speaks to a congregation that includes people who seldom participate in the life of the Church, or who are members of other Christian denominations or religious communities. The occasion thus provides a valuable opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ”.<sup>247</sup>

#### ACCOMPANYING THE FIRST YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE

217. It is important that marriage be seen as a matter of love, that only those who freely choose and love one another may marry. When love is merely physical attraction or a vague affection, spouses become particularly vulnerable once this affection wanes or physical attraction diminishes. Given the frequency with which this happens, it is all the more essential that couples be helped

<sup>247</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 59.