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Laboratory No. 22 Opening Speech

THE FAMILY AND THE NEED FOR SPIRITUALITY: PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCES

Thanks to all of you for coming here today, to our speakers, Mons. Carlo Rocchetta, from Perugia, Mr and Mrs Orsi and Ferenc Hardi, from Taizè (France), Mr and Mrs Maria Grazia and Umberto Bovani. Thank you also to Maestro Frigé who immersed us into a spiritual climate with these musical pieces by J.S. Bach from the Lutheran tradition in-keeping with an ecumenical climate, to help us feel in harmony with all the families who live by the Christian experience.

This afternoon, we shall focus on family spirituality. This concept has a significant history. It originates from the pioneering experiences of the thirties and forties, and later spread thanks to the boost given to the theology of marriage by the Second Vatican Council and later by the blessed John Paul II.

This concept was then spread thanks to international movements such as *Équipes Notre-Dame*, founded in 1938 by father Caffarel (scattered over 50 countries), and the more recent *Marriage Encounter*, founded in the sixties and already widely-known in over 100 countries. Today, there are many other initiatives and experiences that develop and offer spirituality for the couple and the family. It is supported and upheld by many couples and many priests and religious, convinced that to help live and to focus concrete, daily experience of love between a husband and wife in the light of the gospel is a wonderful gift. And this then leads to the sacramental reality of their union.

At the basis of family spirituality lies the conviction that the height of Christian life (perfection), far from being exclusive to the state of celibacy, may and must be lived by a husband and wife *via, thanks to and within* marriage, and not *despite* marriage (this was an implicit context in the past).

In other words, the *sequela Christi* that characterises the choice of every Christian, that is, the desire to become like him in life, in relationships and in the way we love, finds specific and qualified undertones in marriage. In the marriage, the *sequela Christi* is implemented thanks to the deep, unshakable relationship strived for together with the spouse, cultivated in close contact with the Word, in the tenderness of body expression, in sincere and intimate dialogue between spouses in opening up to life.

The first attempts at family spirituality perhaps sinned in abstractness and deductivism, drawing a theoretical spiritual doctrine from theology and ethics which is far from the real and concrete life of a married couple and families. It gradually

became clear that only a daily, historical and concrete life of a couple, and so a Christian experience lived to the full in their marital relationship, can generate conjugal spirituality.

Every Christian experience cannot fail to consider the diversities of historical, psychological and social situations: it is there, in the concrete reality of each single situation, that the husband and wife will find their “style” of loving each other “until the end”, like Jesus does, and to love the children they have been blessed with. To cultivate as husband and wife this deep relationship with the Lord within their family life – and this is the core of spirituality – will help the members of the family to understand each other, and interpret each situation from the Christian point of view. It will help them find a central unifying point that will enable them to confront the many burdens of daily life, to perfect a Christian style in the management of their possessions, the discernment of affections, the division of time between work and celebration, and will constitute a bedrock in times of difficulties and suffering.

We shall now hear three statements that are, in fact, testimonies, and which shall offer experiences and ideas, share good insights and good practices, on how to interpret and live family spirituality in this day and age.

These presentations will be preceded by a video that shows excerpts of religious life, filmed in a number of monasteries around Milan, and which Cardinal Montini, when he was Archbishop of Milan and before becoming Pope Paul VI, saw as a “lifebuoy”, an offer of restoration and spirituality, in the service of a frenetic and busy city.

Spirituality joins together all believers, and supports and promotes the lifestyles of families, presbyters and religious alike, according to the state of the person: in the testimony of marital love, concrete and open to life for some, and in the testimony of universal love that awaits its fulfilment for others. The link is fertile between the affective and spiritual experience of the family, and the affective and spiritual experience of religious and presbyters, and between love that hazards its concrete nature sometimes clashing with its own limits and failures and love that assumes its limit and incompleteness to testify to a concrete opening of its horizons.

We fervently hope that this time will enable everyone to go home with at least one prompt for enriching your marital life. We shall leave some space at the end for your intervention. Join in with the words and the chants, and enjoy this occasion!