

## **COMMUNICATION of Bishop Eugenio Zanetti**

(Priest of the diocese of Bergamo, Italy, in charge of the diocesan group "La Casa": spiritual guidance and canonical counseling for the separated, divorced or remarried)

Laboratory - No.25

Separated, divorced and remarried in the registry office between work and holiday

### **Premise**

Our conference will shed a light of hope on the family, though faced with hard times, and now also by the problems related to employment, a hope that is called to gather and express themselves in an authentic and genuine Christian feast. This concerns most families, and is even more intensified with the concerns and hopes of facing the reality of broken families, wounded by a separation that has caused deep pain and disorientation for spouses, children, relatives and friends, even for the Christian community. We can not ignore this difficult and complex experience of many of our brothers and sisters, and therefore we are challenged to find the light in our Christian faith that can restore confidence and courage in these specific family situations. Certainly the drama of separation and its consequences, as well as the complexity that a union can lead to from a work and economic point of view, casting great effort and concern on these large families, and so perhaps undermining the value and beauty of moments of joy and celebration. The challenge that the Church is facing today is precisely to turn these shadows into new and brighter light, firstly to prevent or recover situations of separation, but also with the intention of being maternally close to the situations that are no longer stable and impossible to recover. It refers, therefore, to develop the sources of grace that come from the sacrament of marriage and continue even in situations of trial, pain and fatigue, that work not in vain, but on the contrary, with the mystery of Jesus' cross to rediscover meaning and hope.

### **Work : to continue loving ...**

When a person marries it adds to motivation to his work and also family objectives: his job is not just a means of survival, for the realization of his abilities and ambitions, but also for the maintenance of his family, to give it security and serenity and for the chance of giving birth to children and helping them grow up in serenity. By working, men and women, husbands and wives cooperate with each other, and their children themselves, as they grow, offer their input. We know that earning and enjoying the fruits of one's effort has never been easy, not even today: "*Man enjoys his bread from the sweat on his face, that is, not only with personal effort and toil, but also in the midst of many tensions, conflicts and crises, in relation to the reality of work, which disturb the life of individual societies and also of the entire humanity.*"<sup>1</sup>

One of the difficulties faced today is caused by the separation of the family. It involves a big risk for spouses of losing their dignity and confidence, losing the sense of their lives, being the reason to live and work: *who and what am I working for, what sense does my working have now, if I have lost one of the main reasons for living, the most important project of my life?* And so the discomfort,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ioannes Paulus II, *Laborem exercens*, 14.09.1981, n.1.

disorientation, despair can invade the hearts and minds of many couples, ... even with thoughts of giving up on life.

On the other hand, to make matters worse, a commitment to work becomes even more necessary and urgent, for separated, divorced or remarried spouses especially those with children as expenses increase: legal fees, new housing, the maintenance of a spouse (if required), food for the children (if there are any), the management of a possible new family .... Therefore it is absolutely necessary to hold onto the job you have, maybe even find a second job to supplement your income. The drama increases when one has no possibility of having your own housing (and maybe one should return to ones parents' home or find temporary accommodation), or when one is left without a job!

Faced with these situations there can be different reactions. Some people, wanting to forget the pain of separation, throw themselves into work, becoming totally absorbed, looking for the satisfaction that the family has not given him. Some people, in order to earn the money they need to provide for all the needs, agree to do any job, even if inadequate. Others, deeply disheartened, go wild, neglecting their jobs, no longer interested in anything, not even the family. Luckily there are those who are able to react or at least try to do their best.

In these situations, of course, there is the risk of losing the good and peaceful sense in working, reducing it to a mere economic advantage or a burden which at times is unbearable. And so the person can no longer find the "humanity" in the work place, ie. a place of fruitful encounter between humanity and creation, a place to participate and collaborate in the building of a good and happy society, above all a Pro-family society: *"If you want to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, you must first of all believe in this principle . Work is an asset to man – it is good for his humanity - because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his needs, but also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, " becomes more human"<sup>2</sup>".*

The risk of losing the humanizing function of work actually means the risk of jeopardizing the divine image that the Lord has placed in us as collaborators in his creative work, and especially the propagation of the gift of life which He continually gives to humanity and to everything He created.

But, for those living in conditions of separation, divorce or a new marriage, the simple need to spend more time at work, beyond being a mere psychological relief or simple economic necessity, can turn into an opportunity, a golden human and Christian opportunity. In fact, the mere need to focus on this activity, can become even more vital, making one seek for the good sense and the value within oneself: finds or deepens the sense of working to restore or improve the positive thinking within themselves as creatures and loved by God to bring together his plan of the elevation and redemption of the world! You may discover even more strongly the call of God, also founded on the sacrament of marriage, to participate with Him for the good of the people and our families (even if split up) entrusted to us. It is the revival of this divine vocation that restores dignity and value to the existence of those who live special family situations, helping to overcome a perception of total failure.

Of course, all this is not easy, as it requires "hard work and passion", because it requires the overcoming of resistance, obstacles, conflicts, selfishness ... sins. Work shares the hard work of the original Adam and Eve after the Original Sin, but also shares the passion with which Jesus redeemed humanity, including the greatness of work: *"The sweat and toil, which work necessarily marks the present condition of mankind with, gives the Christian and each man, who is called to follow Christ,*

---

<sup>2 2</sup> lb., n.9.

*the opportunity to participate in the work that Christ came to fulfill. This work of salvation came about through his suffering and death on the cross. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Christ who was crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of mankind. He shows himself a true disciple of Jesus, leading him in turn to the cross every day in the job he was called to accomplish.<sup>3</sup> "*

In the light and strength of the cross of Jesus who offered himself for love, and the profound meaning of work can be found and experienced as a "gift" to oneself for the good of others: spouses, children, and anyone else who needs you. For a separated, divorced or remarried person, the need to work harder thus becomes possible in order to work better, ie to find in this effort a way to continue to loving ones family, to live with love and not hate. Only love, in fact, brings peace and restores joy to our lives.

### ***Celebration : ... to continue living in peace***

When speaking of the family celebration we are called to think of the time when the family is together with the full enjoyment and joy of being together and the rekindling of the feeling of affection that binds and sustains it, it is a way of continually re-experiencing the original choice that has given meaning, direction and production to our lives, including memory of the wedding: *"such a day [Sunday], thus appears as the primordial holy celebration, in which all believers, wherever they live, can become heralds and guardians of the sense of time. From this day, in fact, comes the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death."<sup>4</sup> " Sunday, birthdays, Christmas or Easter holidays ... are all moments where we stop to observe and enjoy what we are, to be pleased with what we have experienced.*

But for those who are separated, Sunday unfortunately is no longer the day of intimacy with your spouse, but often the most lonely day, and if there are children, we must accept that the alternation means one Sunday with 'one spouse and the other with the other spouse, and also for the other festivities. And the broken silence on the festive day can be dull rumbling sound which is the cause of great suffering and a deep laceration. Even when the separation was a necessary way to avoid greater evils, nevertheless it leaves a great bitter void.

And so the festivity, for a separated person, can cause more trouble than joy; on a personal level, because it can enhance the feeling of loneliness, increase the sense of failure, exacerbate the pain of deprivation of family affection, in a ruthless comparison with the "before" or with families still united. In terms of relations with the other parent, if there are children, the holidays can become a source of new tensions or the escalation of conflicts, and everything may be complicated further in the presence of new bonds or new unions.

How to recover hope? By recognizing the good things in life and saying thank you, by celebrating the Eucharist, by celebrating Easter even in these situations?

Here, like for work, a situation which is certainly the bearer of toil and suffering can be transformed into a new opportunity a positive opportunity to review the overall situation of their lives, to overcome situations which have crystallized, to discover other dimensions of parenthood that are often neglected or superficially lived in daily routine. In fact, one is forced to reschedule ones time to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of time, outside of a work routine and the daily commitment in which we sometimes take refuge. Even with children, the holidays can be spent with them as an opportunity to strengthen relationships, love, and education. Although the marketplace has noticed these new

---

<sup>3</sup> Ib., n.27.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, post-synodal exhortation, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 22.02.2007, n.73.

realities, and has begun offering solutions and packages for holidays, vacations or simple pastime activities for single parents and children. But this must not be reduced to just a marketplace trick, a new source of mere gain: you can not speculate on situations of suffering for economic gain!

Instead, we must support broken families to rediscover and live a real and true sense of celebration, not as a substitute or anesthetic way of covering up the gap, but as a real boost of joy. The secret which the Gospel of Jesus offers is all in "recognition" to the various parties which recognize the many gifts the Lord gives us: life, faith, love, solidarity, generosity ... Going beyond the pain, without forgetting it, but even without being overwhelmed by it. And this is exactly what we live on Sunday in celebration of Jesus' Passover from death to life, from defeat to resurrection, from anguish to hope, from sadness to joy. Jesus himself went through the tunnel of loneliness and abandonment, but has retained the firm belief of always being in the loving hands of God the Father. Making a living memory of that Sunday Mass just means celebrating the "Eucharist", namely to recognize and thank the Lord for that infinite and eternal love that He has for each of us, in any situation we are in, even if separated, divorced or remarried: He never abandons us!

The Pope reserves this invitation to the families, without exception: *"particularly encouraging families to draw inspiration and strength from this sacrament. The love between man and woman, openness to life, the task of education are revealed to be privileged spheres in which the Eucharist can show its ability to transform and give full meaning to our existence"*.<sup>5</sup> Here is the chance that may arise for those who are somehow forced by the circumstances of life to give more value to time and especially at holiday time: in the light of Christian faith it's only on the seventh day, that the Lord can restore vigor even to a life that carries the load of a separation. Only the reconciliation with God can bring about a reconciliation with others, with ourselves and with creation, and give a profound sense of peace, anticipation and prelude of the joy with which we are called to the banquet of heaven.

## Conclusion

Even for the Christian community it is not easy to be with these broken families, supporting them both in the workplace and in the festivities and sometimes not knowing how to behave, or whether the person is alone, or if he/she is taken back, even to avoid embarrassment or confusion in the community. Yet, more than ever, the Church is called today to be close to these families a wounded heart, in spite of everything to help giving a sense to their good work and to rediscover the joy of being embraced by the largest family celebration of the Lord:

*"It will be necessary for the pastors and the community of the faithful to suffer together with and to love the people concerned with solidarity, so that they may recognize in their burden the sweet heart and light of the burden of Jesus. Their burden is not sweet and light as in small or insignificant but becomes lighter because it is shared by the Lord - and together with him by the whole Church. It is the pastoral task, which must be carried out with total dedication, to offer this help, founded in truth and love together"*<sup>6</sup>.

Even the Church has suffered complex situations which may arise as a precious opportunity to rediscover and revive its potential, linked to the action that the Holy Spirit produces in it to create and recreate, shape and reshape the lives of men and their families.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ib., n.79.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Card. Ratzinger, *Letter to the bishops of the catholic Church concerning the reception of holy communion by the divorced and remarried members of the faithful*, 14.09.1994, n.10.