

On Friday 19th October “Progett Impenn” held the latest in its series of initiatives within the context of its pro-active drive to defend the dignity of the family as a unique and fundamental cell of society. A sizeable audience was introduced to the key speaker of the evening, His Lordship Monsignor Jean Laffitte, current secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family. Monsignor Laffitte took everybody by surprise as he greeted the Archbishop of Malta, Monsignor Paul Cremona O.P. and the audience present, in Maltese.

He started by saying that this basic institution of society is at the heart of the preoccupations of the Church, going on to describe the family as “the mystery of coniugal love”. Citing Pope Leo XI's 1930 encyclical “Casti Connubii”, Mons Laffitte commented about the radical change in mentality over the last 50 years. Society has changed its approach and is now challenging the previously accepted definition of marriage and its obligations. The big blow to the institution of marriage dates back to the French Revolution with the introduction of a law accepting the end of civil marriages.

A further complication during the last years has been a shift in the ideology of genders better known as the “sexual revolution, by which the western world changed its perception of sexuality. Gender rights have created a rift between gender and nature in that the difference in sexes is viewed from the perspective of a social situation. This is a problem which concerns the very nature of man and woman because the family must never be seen as an idea but as a fundamental experience within which, as stated in the encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” of Benedict XVI, Eros and Agape are not in competition but a balance to each other. The fundamental role of the family, therefore, is the transmission of these values especially to the young ones.

Society has an interest in the family and in what happens between married couples because it recognises the advantages of the union. Marriage is a commitment to give oneself to the other spouse, always, but especially if contracted sacramentally. Monsignor Laffitte drew comparison between marriage and co-habitation explaining that the latter situation is a volatile experience while marriage is a commitment for life. Hence, relativising the family is a dangerous road leading towards the weakening of the very fabric of society. This phenomenon is having its say on youngsters who seem

progressively more uncertain about taking the decision to engage in a lasting commitment.

The indissolubility, however, belongs to the very essence of the love between a man and a woman. This is not an invention of the Church but a reality recognised in many civilisations. Another important aspect of marriage is openness to life as a consequence of the plans of the Creator in the sense that spouses are His partners in the process of the conservation of humanity.

Monsignor Laffitte recognised that modernity is dominated by the invasive presence of media whose influence complicates the processes of marriage preparation. Mons Laffitte then explained that marriage is not an episode but the result of a series of stages beginning with the first encounters through courting, engagement and eventual union. Until the final step is reached the couple belong to each other but still are not united. Therefore, through the stages leading to marriage, within a Christian backdrop, the couple must not view the road as a preamble to co-habitation but a waiting anticipation for the day of their union.

This anthropological aspect is a basic value for the sanctification of marriage.
On many

occasions we are witness to couples who ask for the sacrament but then live as if it never happened, staying away from the Church maybe for years until they start bringing their offspring for baptism. This contradiction needs to be tackled emphatically during marriage preparation because the sanctity transmitted by the sacrament is a mystery which transcends the couple itself. No amount of emphasis is sufficient to stress the importance of sacraments and prayer in married life as necessary practices to establish the domestic church with Christ ever present. While sacramental practice gives life to the family, prayer keeps burning the lamp of commitment especially in the education of children. It must never be forgotten that children are creatures wanted by God so, the family must always keep in mind its duty to teach them to honour Him.

At the end of Monsignor Lafitte's lecture, a young couple, parents of a twelve-weeks old baby, gave their experience highlighting the points raised by the speaker and affirmed that spirituality in marriage is strengthened by the presence of God through the awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit, a point made by Pope Benedict XVI during the World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia, the occasion where they first met without any thought that their meeting would eventually result in marriage. Mr Cachia made two points: one, that a successful marriage must rest completely on the principle that spouses are a gift to each other in spite of difficulties, a gift which never stops growing and two, that this experience needs to be transmitted to other peer couples.

A session of questions from the floor followed during which Monsignor Lafitte made a very strong point about psychological problems resulting from the breakdown of cohabitation. He alerted women that experience has taught him that the end of a co-habitation brings much more suffering to the female than to the male.

The evening ended with a short comment and a prayer led by the Archbishop Monsignor Paul Cremona O.P.