

INTERVIEW WITH HIS EXCELLENCY MONS. BRUNO FORTE, ARCHBISHOP OF CHIETI-VASTO, WELL-KNOWN THEOLOGIAN AND MEMBER OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE AND THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING NEW EVANGELIZATION.

*On the occasion of the ad limina visit of the Bishops of Abruzzo-Molise to the Pontifical Council for the Family, we asked Archbishop Bruno Forte some questions about the meaning of the Christian marriage in today's world and about the Church's pastoral action in favor of the family and life. This led to a rich and far-reaching theological-pastoral reflection that helps to reread in depth current issues. The first part of the interview is published today, January 21<sup>st</sup>, on the site [www.familia.va](http://www.familia.va). The second part will appear next on Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup>.*

*D. The family is characterized by **strong bonds** (that are unique, indissoluble) between the spouses, married couples with children. There are strong relationships between the sexes (male-female) and between generations (parents and children). Society and culture, however, seem to characterize themselves by a kind of **weakness**, the "liquidity" of relations and relationships. All this often sets off "sparks" and rather coarse oppositions. What do you think? How —even in this context - can a possibility for constructive dialogue be found?*

R. I would begin with the definition of our modern society, as a "liquid modernity": the definition comes from the Jewish Anglo-Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Here is how Bauman defines liquidity: it's not the absence of certainties or of truths; there are too many, and because of this overabundance each person absolutizes his own point of view, his own universe. This means that there is a lack of common horizons, dreams or hopes, capable of uniting, embracing, as in the old world of ideologies, of these great stories that, in opposition to one another, unified and diversified. Now, paradoxically, precisely in this liquid society, but people feel the need to have the possibility of real ties, bonds that help them to overcome the liquidity, the weakness of the moment. That is why the Gospel of the family, as the Church's faith offers it, is both disturbing and subversive for this widespread perception of liquidity, but also a Gospel of hope, Good News against loneliness. This implies venturing that in life it is possible to create true ties, based on a covenant of eternal love and that this is naturally cannot be accomplished by human strength alone, but thanks to a calling and a gift that comes from above. Precisely for this reason it seems to me that in this liquid society the proposal of the family, a love at once possible and impossible, incarnated in the fragment of a couple's life and a parental-marital relationship is an authentic Gospel.

*D. Marriage is a sacrament, Christ's real presence among the spouses, in the family, in the Church and in society. Is this this presence visible even today? What is the **existential value of the sacrament of marriage**?*

R. The word sacrament, as we know, is the Latin translation of the New Testament Greek *mysterion*, which expresses the glory hidden and revealed under the signs throughout History: God's action in human time. And precisely in that way, by talking about the family and marriage as a sacrament, we refer to three major horizons. First of all, that of the origin: the family is not simply a convergence of human interests; it's a response to a call coming from eternity. It's in a way a vocation that draws on the mystery of God's eternal love. The Sacrament points first of all to the divine origin of the family. Secondly, the sacrament makes us understand that the nuptial bond is God's image and likeness, that the Trinity, this relationship of love of the three who are one, is not only the origin but also the exemplary, formal cause of family ties. And, just as in the Trinity the three are distinct in their union, so in family life, by an analogy naturally weak because of human frailty yet strong by the grace of God, the two and their procreative fertility are the sign of a unity that is built every day but also given from above, and this is the image of the Trinity. Finally, then, the Trinity is the destiny: the family, like all human beings, is on the way to the homeland, that is, to a horizon of great significance. We are not flung toward death or precipitated into a void; we are the beggars of Heaven, and in the Christian conception the family means living together on this journey to the homeland. The two not only promise each other fidelity and love, but stake together on a horizon of meaning, hope and beauty, which is the horizon of God. For all these reasons, emphasizing the sacramental character of the union, it seems to me, is very important, and even more important today, in liquidity we were talking

about, in the fragility, where there is a lack of horizons and strong roots, there is a greater need than ever to find anchors on which to build a relationship that is lasting, stable and, precisely for this reason, a source of truth, beauty and peace.

*D. The marriage incarnates and shows **the wonder of difference**. Marriage is a mystery of communion and difference. How can it be more visible in the church community, but also in the inter-cultural community?*

R. The paradox of love, fully revealed in the Christian mystery, is that unity and communion are not opposed to diversity and difference. I believe that the Gospel of the Trinity, in this sense, has an extraordinary fruitfulness for all aspects of life, but especially for the relational life of the couple and the family. This means two things: one is that everyone in the family must be himself; there must be no confusion of roles and identities -there is a father, there is a mother, and there are children- and these are not empty words; these words certainly imply reciprocity but also identity fruitful. We need mothers who are mothers generating life, able to have that sixth sense, that understanding of others – first of the child, of course, but also of the husband- in a non-verbal way, that is not merely conceptual; we need a father, who is somehow in this relationship of reciprocity the generative and also indicative reference of life; we need the children who are the expression of this fertility and, at the same time, know how to relate to parents in a relationship constituted by both deep communion and otherness, i.e. they live their lives, their history, according to their vocation, their freedom. However, all this must not be detrimental to their communion: the family is a place of dialogue and mutual acceptance. I understand that saying these things in the face of so many situations of crisis may seem utopian, but, in a certain sense, as Emerson said, “the innocent have accomplished impossible things because they didn’t know they were impossible,” i.e., if we don’t have our perception open to the God’s promise and based on His proximity, His fidelity -but which precisely for reason dares to challenge the attitudes of renunciation and self-reliance-, we will never build a road to beauty that realizes the human person and the family community exactly according to God's plan.