



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO THE OFFICIALS OF THE TRIBUNAL OF THE ROMAN ROTA  
FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE JUDICIAL YEAR**

*Clementine Hall  
Saturday, 25 January 2020*

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**[Multimedia]**

*Your Excellency,  
Prelate Auditors,  
Dear Officials of the Roman Rota,*

I am pleased to be able to meet you today, on the occasion of the inauguration of the New Judicial Year of this Tribunal. I warmly thank His Excellency, the Dean, for the noble words he addressed to me and for the wise methodological resolutions that have been formulated.

I wish to return to the catechesis of the [General Audience of Wednesday, 13 November 2019](#), offering to you today a further reflection on the primary role the spouses Aquila and Priscilla played as examples of married life. Indeed, in order to follow Jesus, the Church has to work according to three conditions validated by the Divine Teacher himself: *itinerancy*, *promptness* and *decision* (cf. [Angelus](#), 30 June 2019). The Church is, by her very nature, on the move; she does not remain confined and unperturbed in her specific area; she is open to the widest horizons. The Church is sent forth to take the Gospel to the streets and to reach the human and existential peripheries. It reminds us of the New Testament married couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

The Holy Spirit wished to place this admirable example of *itinerant* spouses beside the Apostle [Paul]. Indeed both in the Acts of the Apostles and according to Paul's description, they were never still but always in continuous movement. And we wonder, why for many centuries, this example of itinerant spouses did not have their identity recognized as evangelizing spouses within the pastoral teaching of the Church. It is what our parish Churches need, in particular in urban areas where the parish priest and his assistants in the clergy will never have enough time and

energy to reach the faithful who, while calling themselves Christian, do not receive the Sacraments and are without or almost without the knowledge of Christ.

So many centuries later, the *modern image* of these holy spouses ever on the move so that Jesus might be known, is surprising: They evangelized, transmitting their passion for the Lord and for the Gospel, a passion of the heart that translated into practical gestures of proximity, of closeness to the neediest brothers and sisters, of welcome and care.

In the *preface* to the reform of the Marriage Process, I was insistent on two pearls: proximity and gratuity. This should not be forgotten. Saint Paul found in this couple a way to be *close* to the distant ones and he loved them and stayed with them in Corinth for more than one year, because they were spouses who were teachers of selflessness. I often feel afraid of the judgement that God will have for us over these two things. In judging, was I close to the heart of the people? In judging, did I open my heart to *gratuity* or was I taken up by commercial interests? God's judgment will be quite harsh on this.

From Aquila and Priscilla, Christian spouses should learn how to fall in love with Christ and to be close to families, who often lack the light of faith, not through their own fault, but because they are left on the sidelines by our pastoral care: an elite pastoral care that forgets the people.

How I would like this discourse not to be simply a symphony of words but rather that it may spur pastors, bishops, and parish priests to seek to love, as the Apostle Paul did, spouses as humble missionaries willing to reach our cities' squares and buildings where the Gospel's light and the voice of Jesus fail to penetrate. And at the same time, Christian spouses who have the courage to awaken others from their slumber, as Aquila and Priscilla did, capable of being agents, let us not say autonomously, but certainly filled with enough courage, to awaken from lethargy and slumber, those pastors who perhaps are stuck in the philosophy of the small circle of perfects. The Lord came to seek the sinners not the perfect ones.

In the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* Saint Paul VI observed: "before speaking, we must take great care to listen not only to what men say, but more especially to what they have it in their hearts to say. Only then will we understand them and respect them, and even, as far as possible, agree with them" (n. 87). Listening to the heart of mankind.

As I recommended to Italian Bishops, it is a case of listening to the flock, being "close to the people, attentive to learning their language, to draw near to each person with charity, supporting people in the nights of their solitude, restlessness and failures" (Discourse to the General Assembly of the Episcopal Conference of Italy, 19 May 2014).

We must be aware that it is not the pastors who, through their human enterprise, — albeit in good will — invent holy Christian couples. They are the work of the Holy Spirit who is always the

protagonist of the mission, and they are already present in our territorial communities. It is up to us pastors to illuminate them, to give them visibility, to make them wellsprings of a new ability to live a Christian marriage, and also to protect them so they do not fall into ideologies. These couples that the Holy Spirit certainly continues to enliven must be ready “to go out of themselves and be open to others, to live the closeness, the way of living together, which transforms every interpersonal relationship into an experience of fraternity” ([General Audience](#), 16 October 2019). Let us think about pastoral care as a catechumenate before and after marriage. These are the couples that should do it and move forward.

It is necessary to be vigilant so that they do not fall into the danger of particularism, opting to live in chosen groups. On the contrary, it is necessary “to open to the universality of salvation” (*ibid.*). Indeed if we are grateful to God for the presence within the Church of movements and associations that do not neglect the formation of Christian spouses, then we must firmly state that the parish is the ecclesial place for proclamation and witness because it is in that territorial context that Christian spouses worthy of shedding light already dwell. They can be active witnesses of conjugal and family beauty and love (cf. Apostolic Exhortation [Amoris Laetitia](#), 126-130).

Thus the Apostolic Action of the parish is illuminated in the Church by the presence of spouses like those described by Paul and Luke in the New Testament; never still, always on the move, certainly with children, according to what the iconography of the Oriental Churches has handed down to us. Therefore, may pastors allow themselves to be illuminated by the Spirit today too, so that this salvific news may be fulfilled by couples who are often already prepared, but *not called*. They exist.

The Church today needs married couples *on the move* anywhere in the world. Ideally starting, however, from the roots of the Church of the first four centuries and that is from the catacombs, as [Saint Paul VI](#) did at the end of the [Council](#) by going to the Catacombs of Domitilla. In those catacombs that saintly Pontiff said: Here, Christianity planted its roots in poverty, in the ostracism of the powers, in the suffering of unjust and bloody persecutions. Here, the Church was stripped of all human power, she was poor, she was humble, she was pious, she was oppressed, she was heroic. Here, the primacy of the Spirit of which the Gospel speaks had its dark, almost mysterious but undefeated affirmation, his incomparable witness, his martyrdom (cf. Homily, 12 September 1965).

If the Spirit is not invoked and thus remains unknown and absent (cf. [Homily, Santa Marta](#), 9 May 2016) in the context of our particular Churches, we will lack the strength of those Christian married couples who are the soul and the form of evangelization. In practice: living the parish as that “juridical-salvific” territory because it is “home among homes”, families of families (cf. homily at Albano), 21 September 2019); a Church — that is a parish — poor for the poor; enthusiastic couples in love with their faith in the Risen One, capable of a new revolution of the tenderness of love like Aquila and Priscilla, who never felt satisfied or inadequate.

One might think that these holy spouses of the New Testament never had the time to appear tired. This is actually how they were described by Paul and Luke for whom they were almost indispensable companions precisely because they were not called by Paul but created by the Spirit of Jesus. It is here that their apostolic dignity as Christian spouses is founded. It is the Holy Spirit who created them. Let us think about when a missionary arrives in a place: the Holy Spirit is already there waiting for him. The long silence surrounding these holy figures of the early Church is certainly quite perplexing.

I invite and urge all the brother bishops and pastors to indicate these saintly spouses of the early Church as faithful and bright companions of the Pastors of that time; as support, today of, for example, how young and elderly Christian married couples can always make Christian marriage fruitful with children in Christ. We must be convinced, and I would like to say certain, that similar married couples in the Church are already a gift of God, and not through our merit, but because they are the fruit of the action of the Spirit that never abandons the Church. Rather, the Spirit awaits the ardour of our pastors so that the light that these spouses radiate in the peripheries of the world are not extinguished. (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, nn.4-10).

Hence, allow the Spirit to renew us so as not to resign ourselves to being a Church of the few, to almost enjoy being isolated leaven lacking the capacity of the spouses of the New Testament, to multiply in humility and obedience to the Spirit. The Spirit that illuminates and is capable of making salvific our human action and our very poverty; it is capable of making salvific all our activities; ever convinced that the Church does not grow by proselytism but by attraction — the witness of these people attracts — and always ensuring the signature of bearing witness.

We do not know whether or not Aquila and Priscilla died as martyrs but they certainly are a sign of martyrdom, at least spiritually for today's spouses, that is, witnesses capable of being leaven in the flour, of being leaven in the dough, [leaven] that dies to become the mass of dough (cf. *Discourse to the Associations of Catholic Families in Europe*, 1 June 2017). This is possible everywhere today.

Dear Judges of the Roman Rota, the *darkness of faith* or the *desert of faith* that your decisions, starting 20 years ago, have stated as possible causes for the annulment of consent, gives me, as it did to my predecessor *Benedict XVI* (cf. *Allocutions of the Roman Rota*, 23 January 2015 and *22 January 2016*; *22 January 2012*); cf. art. 14, *Ratio procedendi* of the Motu Proprio *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus*), the reason to extend a serious and pressing invitation to the children of the Church of our time, to all feel called to deliver to the future, the beauty of the Christian family.

The Church needs *ubicumque terrarum* of married couples like Aquila and Priscilla who can speak and live with *the authority* of Baptism, that “does not consist in commanding and making oneself heard, but in being consistent, being a witness and for this reason, being companions on the way of the Lord” (Homily, Santa Marta, 14 January 2020).

I give thanks to the Lord because still today he gives the children of the Church the courage and the light to return to the beginnings of faith and find again the passion of the spouses Aquila and Priscilla, so that they may be recognizable in every marriage celebrated in Christ Jesus.

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