

"Change the water of habit into new joy"

In his 23 October general audience, Pope Francis continued catechetical cycle on how the Holy Spirit guides the People of God through salvation history, speaking about the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of marriage.

10/23/2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last time we explained what we proclaim about the Holy Spirit in the Creed. The reflection of the Church, however, did not stop at that brief profession of faith. It continued, both in the East and in the West, by the work of the great Fathers and Doctors. Today, in particular, we would like to gather a few crumbs of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit developed in the Latin tradition, to see how it enlightens all of Christian life and the sacrament of marriage in particular.

The main originator of this doctrine is Saint Augustine, who developed the doctrine on the Holy Spirit. He sets out from the revelation that “God is love” (*1 Jn 4:8*). Now love presupposes one who loves, one who is beloved, and love itself that unites them. In the Trinity, the Father is He who loves, the source and origin of everything; the Son is He who is beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the

love that unites them.^[1] The God of Christians is therefore a “sole” God, but not solitary; His is a unity of communion and love. Along these lines, some have proposed to call the Holy Spirit not the “third-person singular” of the Trinity, but rather the “first-person plural.” In other words, He is the We, the divine We of the Father and the Son, the bond of unity between different persons,^[2] the very principle of the unity of the Church, which is indeed a “sole body” resulting from several persons.

As I said, today I would like to reflect with you in particular on what the Holy Spirit has to say about the family. What can the Holy Spirit have to do with marriage, for example? A great deal, perhaps the essential, and I will try to explain why! Christian marriage is the sacrament of self-giving, one for the other, of man and woman. This is how the Creator

intended it when he “So God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them” (*Gen 1:27*). The human couple is therefore the first and most elementary realization of the communion of love that is the Trinity.

Married couples, too, should form a first-person plural, a “we.” Stand before each other as an “I” and a “you,” and stand before the rest of the world, including the children, as a “we.” How beautiful it is to hear a mother say to her children: “Your father and I...,” as Mary said to Jesus when they found him at the age of twelve in the temple, teaching the Doctors (cf. *Lk 2:48*), and to hear a father say: “Your mother and I,” as if they were one. How much children need this unity— mother and father together – unity of parents, and how much they suffer when it is lacking! How much the children of separated

parents suffer, how much they suffer.

However, to correspond to this vocation, marriage needs the support of He who is the Gift, indeed the quintessential giver. Where the Holy Spirit enters, the capacity for self-giving is reborn. Some Fathers of the Latin Church affirmed that, as the reciprocal gift of the Father and the Son in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is also the reason for the joy that reigns between them, and they were not afraid, when speaking about it, to use the image of gestures proper to married life, such as the kiss and the embrace.^[3]

No one says that such unity is an easy task, least of all in today's world; but this is the truth of things as the Creator designed them, and it is therefore in their nature. Certainly, it may seem easier and quicker to build on sand than on rock; but Jesus tells

us what the result is (cf. *Mt* 7:24-27). In this case, then, we do not even need the parable, because the consequences of marriages built on sand are, unfortunately, there for all to see, and it is mainly the children who pay the price. Children suffer from the separation or the lack of love of the parents! With regard to so many couples, one must repeat what Mary said to Jesus, at Cana in Galilee: “They have no wine” (*Jn* 2:3). The Holy Spirit is He who continues to perform, on a spiritual level, the miracle that Jesus worked on that occasion; namely, to change the water of habit into a new joy of being together. It is not a pious illusion: it is what the Holy Spirit has done in so many marriages, when the spouses decided to invoke Him.

It would not be a bad thing, therefore, if alongside the information of a legal, psychological and moral nature that is given in the

preparation of engaged couples for marriage, we were to deepen this “spiritual” preparation, the Holy Spirit who makes unity. An Italian proverb says, “Never place a finger, never intervene, between husband and wife.” There is in fact a “finger” to be placed between husband and wife, the “finger of God:” that is, the Holy Spirit!

^[1] Cfr. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 10,14

^[2] Cfr. H. Mühlen, *Una mystica persona. La Chiesa come il mistero dello Spirito Santo*, Città Nuova, 1968.

^[3] Cfr. S. Ilario di Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, II,1; St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 10,11.

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