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PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT 2011

GOD'S REASONING – CHRIST'S REASONING

Brothers and Sisters,

For the Christian Community, Lent is a time to reflect upon the will of God the Father and how our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished it by his death on the cross. It is also an invitation for us to fulfill God's will in all its aspects.

The Lord has several ways of revealing to us the different facets of God's plan.

This year, the Lord has revealed something to us that has always been there, yet in the face of it, we felt helpless. We have not been paying enough attention to the fact that, in our society, the culture of marriage and the family has changed. We complain that things are different, yet we simply resign ourselves to this fact.

This year, the current discussion on the subject of divorce has helped us to realise not only to what extent this erodes everlasting marriage, but it has also led us to question this culture. Probably we are not even aware to what extent this has changed, and that in so doing, it has served as a deterrent to those who wish to marry and persevere in their marriage.

We need to consider this year as a sign of God's providence, because, as Christians, we are faced with a great mission. We cannot put our minds at rest where the culture of marriage is concerned: we have been given a mission to build a new culture with respect to marriage. The Christian does not fear the lack of values in culture, just as the first Christians did not fear it either. We are challenged to fill this void with values inspired by the Word of God.

This forms part of the New Evangelization which is being deemed as a priority by various Popes: through the Church we come into contact with the Word of God, which is a source of great value. This Evangelization must be transmitted through the family.

God's reasoning

The Christian is that person who has decided to follow Christ. The path, the map, is the Word of God. He lives the Word of God within the community which Christ founded – that is, the Church.

The Word of God reveals in a particular way, God's plan for mankind. The Word of God is revealed through two principal expressions. The first is God's logic of creation, the plan of the Creator. The second is the logic, the line of thought, of Jesus Christ: He was sent by God the Father to reveal to us, by his life and his teachings, how to live the ideal of creation in a world fraught with hardships and difficulties. If we make the same choices which Jesus made, we can never be confused when it comes to safeguarding the values of creation.

God is the Divine Creator. He created everything for a reason - with a plan so that creation would achieve its utmost aim. God is not a blind creator. He did not create without letting us know what to do with His creation. He created the human being in his image and likeness and placed him, at the centre of his creation. Every time that mankind veered from this ideal, the whole of humanity suffered: this is evident with regards to the dignity of every person, independent of race, colour, religion. This is revealed further in the respect and care for the environment.

In the same way, God has a plan for marriage and the family. This is the greatest gift which God gave to mankind. This plan bears takes into consideration the dignity of every person, man and woman, which does not stem from culture but stems from the fact that they were created equal in the image of God. This is God's gift of the woman to the man and the man to the woman; the attraction which he instilled in the human being and which is transformed into an enduring love - becoming "one body". God planned this in order that new beings would be born and raised within an atmosphere of love and stability (see Genesis Chapter 1 and 2). All the elements of this plan are so closely connected that when a marriage breaks down, all the benefits of this plan are lost.

According to this plan of God, an option which favours marriage and the family is an option in favour of mankind. Marriage breakdown statistics show that, in reality, although couples undergo much suffering, children are those who suffer the most.

The responsibility of mankind

God entrusted this plan for creation in the hands of mankind. The great responsibility which is placed on man's shoulders is evident from the story of Adam and Eve. God did not only entrust everything to them, but he gave them the responsibility not to wander astray. This is the underlying meaning of the reference to the tree of good and the tree of evil which we find in Genesis (Chapter 3). This is the choice which is to be made by humanity in every age: whether to choose the path leading to God, or to do as they please, guided merely by human reasoning, which leads them away from God.

God does not only place this responsibility upon man's shoulders but he also questions man about his actions regarding this plan. He asked Adam: "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" God also asked Eve: "What have you done?" In Genesis chapter 4, 1-16, God also asks Cain, who had killed his brother, Abel: "Where is your brother Abel?" God asks why they did not follow his plan. The Christian must live his personal life within the community of the Church, fully-aware that he must answer to these questions. This is our responsibility, which we refer to as 'conscience'!

Christ's Reasoning

It is hard to live out these ideals within the context of our complex world. God the Father sent his Son to show us that though we live in a demanding world, it is possible to keep moving towards the ideal of creation.

Jesus Christ taught us to live with love in a world in which we are challenged by distractions within us and around us. Jesus demonstrated this by his self-giving, his forgiveness, his empathy towards those who were weak, his patient teachings to those he chose as his disciples. The option in favour of Divine Reasoning which is referred to above, must be linked to the value of love as Jesus taught us: one cannot live 'true love' by human reasoning only, by not putting God into the equation. True love must be based on the Christian teachings of Jesus Christ.

One episode in the life of the Lord Jesus clearly demonstrates God's plan in the context of marriage and the family (Mt 19, 3-10). When confronted by a group of Pharisees on the subject of divorce, Jesus showed them that he was disappointed and hurt. In the same way God was hurt by the choice made by Adam and Eve. The Pharisees believed that they could create a better society built on the possibility of divorce rather than on the stability which marriage provides.

This refers us back to the fundamental choices of every Christian person: Do I believe and allow myself to be guided by the reasoning of God and his plan for Creation when he created man and woman in complete unity as "one body", or am I led by human logic which is detached from God's plan, leading to the destruction of this unity as a result of divorce? The reality experienced by other societies who opted for this human way of reasoning leads us to take a personal decision. We must discern whether a society in which there is divorce offers a better future than a society which has at its foundations, stable marriages which are worth investing in.

In this regard, the Christian must not be afraid to think differently from others, because he feels confident that even if he is alone in the eyes of the world on this point, he is not alone before God. It is a great consolation to know that the Christian makes his choice before God, even if there is a price to pay.

The love of Jesus

Adam and Eve's failings are already pre-empted by another plan which God has in order to bring them back to his fold. God loves even those who are in a state of sin and he has another plan by which he brings them back to him. God said to Noah: "And behold, I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you..." (Gen 9,9), meaning that God has established a new covenant with mankind who is capable of becoming confused and falling into sin.

Jesus, who was sent by God the Father into this imperfect world, taught us and revealed to us God's plan. Together with his preaching, he showed his love concretely towards those who failed, so as to encourage them to return on the right path. Jesus did not condemn the woman who was caught in adultery but he simply asked her to sin no more. In so doing, he shed light upon the love which God shows to those who fail, in order that they may have another opportunity to find hope in him.

As people who are following in Jesus' footsteps, we should also follow his example with respect to marriage. Those couples who are enjoying the beauty of married life should respond to the call to look lovingly upon others who are suffering from the failure of their marriage and contribute towards giving them a helping hand.

Lent

Since this is so central to God's plan, during Lent, we should focus upon this in order that we too may contribute towards its fulfillment. We wish to offer some recommendations as to how this may be lived out: you may reflect on your married life in the light of the nature of love that flows from the Cross of Jesus. In your married life, draw closer to one another in the Lord Jesus by attending mass together regularly on Sundays and through daily prayer. Integrate your Lenten sacrifices in your conjugal life: work to conquer any elements which are hindering your love. Bear witness to your marriage everywhere and without embarrassment: display photographs of your husband/wife at your workplace; do not engage in any conversations that ridicule married life, or participate in any talk that belittles women.

We cannot imagine a more beautiful way to celebrate Lent than to offer our contribution towards strengthening Marriage and the Family, and to foster in our country a culture which has at its heart, the plan of God. We join you in this mission as we pray to God the Father, together with our Lord Jesus Christ and through the intercession of Our Lady, in order that we may build up this Plan as a gesture of worship to God the Father.

We impart upon you our pastoral blessing.

✠ PAUL CREMONA O.P.
Archbishop of Malta

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