

ZE11091204 - 2011-09-12

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-33410?l=english>

Papal Address to Engaged Couples

"Educate Yourselves Henceforth in the Liberty of Fidelity"

ANCONA, Italy, SEPT. 12, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of the address to engaged couples that Benedict XVI gave Sunday during his visit to Ancona. He made a one-day trip to the Italian port city for the close of the 25th Italian National Eucharistic Congress.

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Dear engaged couples,

I am happy to conclude this intense day, the culmination of the National Eucharistic Congress, by meeting with you, almost as though wishing to entrust the legacy of this event of grace to your young lives. Moreover, the Eucharist, Christ's gift for the salvation of the world, points to and contains the truest dimension of the experience you are living: the love of Christ as the plenitude of human love. I thank the archbishop of Ancona-Osimo, Archbishop Edoardo Menichelli, for his cordial greeting, and all of you for your lively participation; thank you also for the words you addressed to me and which I receive trusting in the Lord Jesus' presence in our midst: He alone has words of eternal life, words of life for you and for your future!

The questions you pose, in the present social context, take on an even greater weight. I would like to give you just one guideline as an answer. For these aspects, ours is not an easy time, above all for you young people. The table is full of many delicious things, but, as in the Gospel episode of the Wedding of Cana, it seems that wine is lacking from the celebration. Above all, the difficulty of finding stable work spreads a veil of uncertainty over the future. This condition contributes to [people choosing to] leave definitive commitments for later, and influences the growth of society in a negative way. Society is not able to appreciate fully the wealth of energies, competencies and creativity of your generation.

The wine of celebration is also lacking from a culture that tends to put aside clear moral criteria: In this disorientation, everyone is seen striving to move in an individual and autonomous way, often only within the perimeter of the present. The fragmentation of the communal fabric is reflected in a relativism that hides essential values; a consonance in sensations, states of mind and emotions seems more important than sharing a plan of life. Also fundamental decisions become vulnerable, exposed to a perennial revocability, which often is considered an expression of liberty, though actually, it points rather to a lack of liberty. The apparent exaltation of the body belongs also to a culture deprived of the wine of celebration, [an apparent exaltation] which in reality trivializes sexuality and tends to make it exist outside a context of communion of life and love.

Dear young people, do not be afraid to face these challenges! Never lose hope. Have courage, also in difficulties, remaining firm in the faith. Be sure that, in every circumstance, you are loved and protected by the love of God, which is our strength. Because of this, it is important that an encounter with him, above all in personal and community prayer, be constant, faithful -- precisely as the path for your love: to love God and to feel that he loves me. Nothing can separate us from the love of God!

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Be sure, moreover, that the Church is also close to you, supports you, and does not fail to regard you with great confidence. She knows that you are thirsty for values, the true values upon which it is worthwhile to build your home. The value of faith, of the person, of the family, of human relations, of justice. Do not lose courage in face of the needs that seem to extinguish joy at the table of life. At the Wedding of Cana, when wine was lacking, Mary invited the servants to go to Jesus and she gave them a precise indication: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Treasure these words, the last of Mary's taken up in the Gospels -- virtually a spiritual testament -- and you will always have the joy of the celebration: Jesus is the wine of the celebration!

As engaged couples you are living a unique stage, which opens to the wonder of encounter and which makes one discover the beauty of existing and of being precious to someone, of being able to say to one another: You are important to me. Live this path with intensity, gradualness and truth. Do not give up on pursuing the lofty ideal of love, which is a reflection and testimony of the love of God!

But, how should this phase of your life be lived? How can you give a witness of love in the community? I would like to suggest to you first of all that you avoid enclosing yourselves in intimate relations, which are falsely tranquilizing; instead, make your relationship become leaven in an active and responsible presence in the community. Moreover, do not forget that to be genuine, love also requires a journey of maturing: beginning from the initial attraction and "feeling well" with the other, educate yourselves to "love well," to "want the good" of the other. Love lives from gratuitousness, self-sacrifice, forgiveness and respect for the other.

Dear friends, all human love is a sign of the eternal Love that has created us, and whose grace sanctifies the decision of a man and a woman to give themselves reciprocally to the life of matrimony. Live this time of engagement in confident waiting for this gift, which must be received by following a path of knowledge, respect, and attentions that you must never neglect. Only under this condition will the language of love become meaningful also with the passing of the years. Hence, educate yourselves henceforth in the liberty of fidelity, which leads to protecting one another, to the point of the one living for the other. Prepare yourselves to choose with conviction the "for ever" that distinguishes love: indissolubility, more than a condition, is a gift that must be desired, requested and lived, beyond any changing human situation. And do not think, along with the widespread mentality, that living together is a guarantee for the future. If you skip the steps of intimacy, which require respect for time and a gradual progression of expressions, you will get burned in love; love needs room for Christ, who is capable of making a human love faithful, happy and indissoluble. The fidelity and enduring nature of your love will also make you capable of being open to life, of being parents: The stability of your union in the sacrament of matrimony will enable the children that God wishes to give you to grow confident in the goodness of life. Fidelity, indissolubility and transmission of life are the pillars of every family, a true common good, a precious patrimony for the whole society. Henceforth, found on them your path to matrimony and give witness of this to your contemporaries: This is a precious service! Be grateful to those who with commitment, competence and willingness accompany you in formation: They are the sign of the attention and care that the Christian community reserves for you. You are not alone: Seek and receive in the first place the company of the Church.

I would like to return again to an essential point: the experience of love has within itself a tension toward God. True love promises the infinite! Hence, make of this time of preparation for matrimony an itinerary of faith: Rediscover for your life as a couple the centrality of Jesus Christ and of walking with the Church. Mary teaches us that the good of each one depends on listening with docility to the word of the Son. In those who trust in him, the water of daily life is transformed into the wine of a love that makes life good, beautiful and fruitful. Cana, in fact, is a proclamation and anticipation of the gift of the new wine of the Eucharist, the sacrifice and banquet in which the Lord reaches us, renews us and transforms us. Do not neglect the vital importance of this encounter; may the Sunday liturgical assembly find you active participants: From the Eucharist springs the Christian meaning of existence and a new way of living (cf. postsynodal apostolic

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exhortation "Sacramentum Caritatis," 72-73). Hence, do not be afraid to take on the committed responsibility of the conjugal choice; do not fear to enter into this "great mystery," in which two persons become one flesh (cf. Ephesians 5:31-32).

Very dear young people, I entrust you to the protection of St. Joseph and Mary Most Holy; following the invitation of the Virgin Mother "Do whatever he tells you," you will not lack the pleasure of the real celebration and you will be able to take the best "wine," the one that Christ gives for the Church and for the world.

I would like to tell you that I am also close to you and to those, like you, who live this wonderful journey of love. I bless you with all my heart!

[Translation by ZENIT]

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