



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 24 October 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Our series of catecheses on the Commandments brings us today to the Sixth Word, which addresses the sentimental and sexual dimension, and states: “*You shall not commit adultery*”.

The immediate call is to fidelity, and indeed no human relationship is authentic without fidelity and loyalty.

One cannot love only as long as it is ‘convenient’; love is truly manifested beyond the threshold of one’s own personal advantage, when one gives unreservedly. As the *Catechism* states: “Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice’” (n. 1646). Fidelity is an attribute of a free, mature and responsible human relationship. Friends, too, reveal themselves as authentic because they remain so in all circumstances, otherwise they are not friends. Christ reveals authentic love; the One who lives in the boundless love of the Father, is, on this strength, the faithful Friend who welcomes us even when we err, and who always wants good for us, even when we do not deserve it.

Human beings need to be loved unconditionally and those who do not receive this acceptance carry a certain incompleteness within themselves, often without knowing it. The human heart seeks to fill this void with surrogates, accepting compromises and mediocrity that have only a vague flavour of love. The risk is to call certain bitter and immature relationships ‘love’, with the illusion of finding the light of life in something that, at best, is merely a reflection of it.

Thus it can happen, for example, that one overestimates physical attraction, which is itself a gift from God, but aims to pave the way for an authentic and faithful relationship with the person. As

Saint John Paul II used to say, the human being “is called to a full and mature spontaneity of relationships”, which is “the gradual fruit of discerning the impulses in one’s own heart”. It is something that is acquired, because every human being must “learn with determination and consistency what the body signifies” (cf. *Catechesis*, 12 November 1980).

The call to married life, therefore, requires a heartfelt discernment of the quality of the relationship and a period of engagement to confirm it. To approach the Sacrament of Marriage, the engaged couple must establish the certainty that the hand of God is in their bond and that he precedes and accompanies them and will enable them to say: *With the Grace of Christ I promise to be faithful to you always*. They cannot promise each other fidelity “*in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health*”, and to love and honour one another all the days of their lives, solely on the basis of good will or of the hope that it ‘will work out’. They need to ground themselves on the solid terrain of God’s faithful Love. And this is why, before receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony, there should be a careful preparation, I would say a catechumenate, because with love one’s entire life is at stake, and one does not kid around with love. Three or four meetings in the parish church cannot be defined as ‘marriage preparation’: no, this is not preparation: this is feigned preparation. And the responsibility falls on those who do this: on the parish priest, on the bishop who permits these things. The preparation must be mature and it takes time. It is not a formality: it is a Sacrament. But it must be prepared with a true catechumenate.

Indeed, fidelity is a way of being, a style of life. One works with loyalty, one speaks with sincerity, one remains faithful to the truth in one’s thoughts, in one’s actions. A life woven of fidelity is expressed in all dimensions and leads to being faithful and reliable men and women in every circumstance.

However, to achieve such a beautiful life, our human nature is not enough. God’s fidelity needs to enter our being, to infect us. This Sixth Word calls us to turn our gaze to Christ whose fidelity can remove from us an adulterous heart and give us a faithful heart. In him and only in him, is there love without reservations and second thoughts, absolute and unmitigated giving, and the tenacity of full acceptance.

From his death and resurrection comes our fidelity, from his unconditional love comes steadfastness in relationships. From communion with him, with the Father and with the Holy Spirit comes communion among us and the ability to live our bonds in fidelity.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord’s

blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I offer a special greeting to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Dear friends, Christ's Gospel message does not ask us to do extraordinary things, but rather to allow God to act in our lives. He told us: "apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Christian life is the encounter between our weakness and the strength of God's grace that allows us to live daily a full and joyful life in which charity means doing everything with joy and humility, for the glory of God and for the good of mankind.