Convocation of Priests
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Tuesday, May 10, 2016

“Living Marriage in Light of the Synod of the Family”

I. Introduction:
   a. In light of the mystery of marriage and family life and the challenges it faces, we have been asked by the Synod Fathers through the Exhortation of Pope Francis to refocus our energy to the pastoral care of all families

      i. For Pope Francis, the pastoral care of families has 3 aspects (AL, 246)
         1. To strengthen love within families
         2. To heal wounds
            a. Proximate and remote wounds
         3. To prevent spread of further breakdowns

      ii. Each of these verbs is important:
          1. "Strengthen" families
             a. There is no perfect family; no perfect marriage
          2. "Heal" families
             a. Some challenges have taken a deep toll, esp. those traumatized by divorce, death and many of the challenges we discussed this morning
          3. "Prevent" spread of further family breakdowns
             a. Especially for those facing transition:
                i. Newly married
                ii. Widows

   b. In order to fulfill this pastoral care mandate, we must take a step back and examine the prism upon which much of the work of the Synod was done.

      i. The prism through which the Holy Father offers his Exhortation is the challenge of “Missionary Discipleship” and Accompaniment

   c. My presentation will have two parts:
      i. Part One: Brief overview of Missionary Discipleship
         1. How it impacts our ministry as priests
ii. Part Two: Application of this pastoral approach to family life

II. Challenge of Missionary Discipleship: “Missionary Discipleship” represents the third step in an evolution of thought on evangelization that began with Blessed Paul VI

i. First Step: Defined the nature of evangelization

1. Pope Paul VI: Evangelii Nuntiandi #22
   a. “There is no real evangelization unless the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom, the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, is proclaimed.”

2. Most basic definition of evangelization:
   a. It is the invitation to encounter, know and love the Lord Jesus and to seek an enduring relationship with him through the community of the Church

3. To encounter Christ = To fall in love with Him

   a. Analogy: same dynamic as falling in love in our ordinary life
      i. Involves the mind: Desire to know everything about the person
      ii. Involves our emotions: Sense of completion
      iii. Involves our will: we make choices to be with and support the person
      iv. Involves those around us: as we seek to be with the person we love and introduce them to others

   b. Falling in love with Christ can occur in many ways
      i. Bernard Lonergan: speaks of three levels of conversion
         1. Intellectual (St. Augustine)
         2. Spiritual (St. Therese)
         3. Moral (St. Alphonsus)
            a. Point: Falling in love with Christ can happen in many different ways
ii. Second Step: Defines the “New Evangelization”

1. The term the “New Evangelization” was first used by the bishops of Latin America who met in Puebla Mexico in 1979.
   a. They spoke of a “new evangelization” to meet the needs of socio-cultural changes of their time
      i. Urbanization, emigrants, rise of sects
      ii. First Point: Change in times demands change in how we proclaim our faith in Jesus and His Church

2. Saint John Paul II builds on this later in the same year
   a. First used the term in a visit to Nova Huta on June 9, 1979
      i. Nova Huta: Communist’s idea of an urban paradise constructed without a church (without God) at very gates of Cracow
         1. Place where the Bishop Karol Wojtyla raised a cross in defiance and celebrated Mass to a crowd too big to disperse
      ii. Point: While the content of the faith is not new, the context will require newness of approach

3. To the Bishops of Haiti in 1983, Pope John Paul explores the idea of its newness further:
   a. New Ardor: Zeal to counter the cooling of a commitment to the faith
   b. New Methods:
      i. Electronic media
      ii. Social networking
      iii. They come with challenges that need to be managed carefully
   c. New Expressions:
      i. Translation of Language is not enough
      ii. Cultural understanding and awareness of what forms the modern person is key

iii. Step Three: begins to specify how to do the work of the New Evangelization through “missionary discipleship”
1. Evangelii Gaudium: Article 120: “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. “

III. There are three aspects to Missionary Discipleship?

i. First: Clarity of Mission
   1. Story of 9/11 attack and the marine
      a. “You are my mission”

2. Key ingredients to Christian Mission
   a. Mission = TO go forth with a clear purpose to those in need
      i. Among the baptized: To deepen each disciple’s relationship with the Lord Jesus and reignite the passion of faith
      ii. Among those not worshipping: To re-light the flame of their own relationship with the Lord Jesus in and through the Church
      iii. Among people of good will: To make an effective proclamation of the offer of salvation in Christ through the community of the Church

ii. Second: It is a mission “to go out” to “those in need" 

1. Two observations:
   a. People are not problems to be solved but rather brothers and sisters with whom we stand in solidarity with those in need
      i. Contrast: two distinct views of mercy
         1. Pulling from above
         2. Lifting from below
            a. “Smell of the sheep”
   b. “Need” in all its forms
      i. Poverty that has invaded Family Life and Marriage

iii. Third: It is a mission that is realized one person at a time= Accompaniment
1. Story: Rio de Janiero and the Boy

2. Scriptural Illustrations of Accompaniment
   a. Two Images
      i. Road to Emmaus:
         1. Emmaus: “no where”
         2. “Walking with people” to help
            them to see the presence of Christ
            already with them
            a. Invite them to Break open
               the Word and Bread of Life
      ii. Ephesians 4
         1. “To love the truth in love”
         2. Must hold onto two goods
            a. “Living The Truth”= we
               cannot compromise what
               we believe
            b. “In Love”= help people in
               their personal struggles to
               love the truth as generously
               and genuinely as they can
               in any given circumstance

iv. This methodology is attempting to answer a fundamental
    question: How do re-establish the credibility of the community
    as one that effectively reflects God’s love?

1. In a religion where Love is the central mystery of Faith:
   a. Trinity: Divine Community of Love
   b. Incarnation: enfleshing of Love for our sake
      i. Cross: Place where that love heals and
         sets me free
   c. If love is not credibly witnessed, then many
      modern people understand
      i. Religious observance to be simply a set of
         rules and regulations
      ii. Institution is simply a structure of power
         (esp. male dominance)
      iii. The claim of faith is simply a myth!

v. “Domestic Church”:
   1. There is no better place to re-establish the credibility of
      love than in the most basic expression of Christian
      community that there is.
IV. Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*

a. “Missionary Discipleship” is lived in three ways
   i. Guidance, Discernment and Integration
   ii. Our role as pastors of the Church is indispensible
      1. Goal: We must be clear as to what we are being asked to do

b. Context: “Logic of Pastoral Mercy” (AL, 307)
   i. Opening observation:
      1. Two ways of thinking:
         a. Casting Off and Reinstating
            i. Casting Off: “Reductivism”
               1. “To judge without taking account of the concrete situation a person lives” (Al, 304)
               2. “Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would “indoctrinate” that message. Turning it into “dead stones” to be hurled at others (AL, #49).

   ii. Five considerations for all in ministry to families:

      1. There is a need to understand and teach the full truth of marriage and Family Life
         a. Young people have a right to know the truth
         b. Our obligation:
            i. Promote and support Christian marriage
            c. In our homilies, teaching and counseling, there can be no room for
               i. Reticence
               ii. Relativism
               iii. Lukewarm attitude towards the ideal

      2. To acknowledge the concrete challenges that people face and accompany these people towards the truth as generously as they can
         a. Pope Francis speaks of the “wonderfully complicated” lives of our people

      3. Recognize and build upon the positive elements that a number of “irregular unions” possess
a. “Constructive Elements” towards an embrace of the fullness of the truth
   i. Need for discernment:
      1. To distinguish what they may be
   ii. Goal: To Foster the most generous response that a person can give to God in the concrete situation he/she faces

4. “Gradualness in Pastoral Care”
a. Important Distinction:
   i. Not Gradualness of the Law
   ii. Rather: Law of Gradualness
      1. “Gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate or fully carry out the objective demands of the law.” (AL, 295)

5. We must walk with a spirit of compassion, avoiding aggravation, undue harsh judgments
   a. Mercy: the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God’s truth

c. First Element: Guidance
   i. Specific help in forming our people’s conscience
      1. “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL, #37)
         a. Knowledge
         b. Appropriation
         c. Lived Witness

d. Second Element: “Responsible personal and pastoral discernment” (AL, 300)
   i. This is not new:
      1. FC #84: “Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obligated to exercise careful discernment of situations.”
   ii. Factor: Degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist that limit the ability to make a decision
      1. Important Distinctions:
         a. Voluntary Acts vs. Free Acts (AL, 273)
i. There may be the desire to do something evil for many reasons but the person may not be freely choose to do it
   1. Same rule does not have the same effects on everyone

ii. Objectively wrong act vs. the culpability of the person

b. Mitigating Factors (AL, 301)
   i. CCC, 1735: ignorance, inadvertence duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, psychological or social factors
   ii. CCC, 2352: affective immaturity, anxiety, social factors

iii. Goal of all Discernment:
   1. “Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits” (AL, 305)

iv. Pastor’s Role in Discernment: (AL, 300)
   1. Guiding these four steps:
      a. Help divorced to understand their situation before God
      b. Conversation with priest in the internal forum
      c. To form a correct judgment on what hinders the possibility of fuller participation in the life of the Church
      d. What steps can be taken to foster that participation

   2. Spiritual qualities of those involved in such discernment:
      a. Open to the Word of God to illuminate the concrete reality of everyday life
      b. Docile to the movement of the Spirit
      c. Encourages each person to act with all possible love in concrete situations
      d. Other spiritual qualities:
         i. Humility, discretion, sincere search for God’s will

v. Four Cautions for Pastors:
1. There is a need to learn to listen carefully to what is being said by those undergoing such discernment
   a. Listen to complexity of situation
   b. Distress experienced

2. Cannot forget that discernment is a dynamic reality (AL, 303)
   a. We will need to walk with people in new stages of growth and to make new decisions

3. We as pastors must be spiritually grounded and avoid the danger to tell people what we believe they wish to hear
   a. We must avoid the danger to want to be liked

4. We must be wary that couples entrusted to our care not abuse this process to justify their situation

   e. Third Element: Integration
      i. This principle is especially useful for those whose situation is “irregular”
         1. Goal: We must do whatever is possible to help people who cannot fully participate in the sacramental life of the Church to take an active part in the community to the most appropriate extent possible
            a. Reach out to them
            b. Allowed them to be touched by grace

   ii. Delicate Balance: (AL, 299)
       1. Achieve fullest integration possible
       2. Avoid scandal

V. Additional Implications for a Ministry of Accompaniment

   a. Need: Revitalize Parish Communities as a “Family of Families”
      i. Story of my Father:
         1. “Grace is thicker than water”

   ii. Parish = Family of families (AL, #202)
      1. Pope Francis: “Church is a family of families”
         a. “The Church is good for the family and the family is good for the Church” (AL #87)
b. Parish = a single family of faith with families, ecclesial movements and communities living in harmony with one another
   i. Parish Life is not meant simply to mirror family life but is a form of family enriched by married life

2. Saint John Paul: Family is “the way of the Church”

   a. Familiaris Consortio #64: “This way of life (i.e., of the immediate family) should then be extended to the wider circle of the ecclesial community of which the Christian family is a part. Thanks to the love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more home-like or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships.”

3. Accompaniment of Families:

   a. Renewal of Marriage Prep Programs
      i. Goal: initiation into the sacrament of marriage (AL, 207)
      
      ii. Two Elements:
         1. Programmatic instruction
            a. Short term
            b. Longer term (AL, 211)
         2. Accompaniment = Mentoring
            a. Story: Example of the Christian Cultural Center
               i. To offer practical advice (AL, 225)
            b. Accompaniment in the first years of marriage (AL, 217)
               i. To see marriage as a lifelong project
               ii. To welcome life and develop responsible parenthood (AL, 222)

   3. We need to foster a culture of Family Life in our parishes
b. To achieve such accompaniment:
   i. It is a communal responsibility, not simply a leadership responsibility!
      1. Accompaniment one person at a time can’t be done by you and me alone
   ii. Need an army of disciples to walk with others
      1. Discipleship is not a “spectator sport”
      2. We must foster real engagement of the laity
         a. Discernment of gifts and talents and offering the challenge to share one talent for the good of the community
   c. Same accompaniment is needed for those who families are in need of healing
      i. Avoid family breakdown:
         1. Dynamic of “crisis” management (AL, 234-237)
            a. Development of Communication skills
            b. Need for patience
            c. Mediation
            d. Reconciliation

iii. My Contention:
   1. Reforming Parish Life as true family is essential to the revitalization of family life

VI. CONCLUSION
a. We are called by the Title “Father” for a reason:
   i. Unity with our people
   ii. Giver of Life
   iii. Protector of Life

b. In this age of great need among our families, let us strive our best to live what we are called!