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**Visit of His Eminence Card. Filoni to Uganda**

26-29 October 2017

**Meeting with Married Couples at Rubaga Cathedral**

Friday, 27 October 2017

**1. Introduction**

Dear Married Couples,

I am happy to meet you in this place, St. Mary’s Cathedral Church, or rather *Rubaga Cathedral*, as you usually call it. A Cathedral Church is, so to speak, a “Family House” for God’s People living in a particular locality. Just as a normal human family needs a house where to live, in a like manner, God’s Household requires a common home. In the light of this analogy, therefore, this Cathedral Church (*Rubaga Cathedral*) is your common house as Family of God in the Archdiocese of Kampala. It is your house, but at the same time *House of God*, His dwelling place; that is, the place where God has a home, near to your own homes. Since the coming of Christ on earth, the Church is truly the place of God’s presence among men. Jesus Christ, being born in the likeness of men, has brought heaven down to us; He is truly “Emmanuel” – God with us. St. John the Evangelist literally says that, *the Son of God became man and made his dwelling among us* (cf. Jn 1: 4).

In this “house”, children are born into the “Family of God” through the sacrament of baptism; the family members are nurtured and nourished through the Holy Eucharist; the spiritually sick members are taken care of and cured through the sacraments of healing (namely, reconciliation and anointing of the sick); the younger members of God’s Family are recognized as grown up members through the sacrament of confirmation; and once they are mature, they receive a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God. And this takes place through the sacraments of matrimony and Holy Orders. Finally, inside these very walls the departed brothers and sisters do receive a final farewell, until our Hope in Eternal Life reunites us in the life to come. As you can see, there is such a close analogy between the Family of God and its sacramental life on the one hand, and our normal human families on the other.

In our human families there are various anniversaries, for instance the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary known as “silver”, or the fiftieth known as “golden”, or the sixtieth known as “diamond”. These anniversaries have parallels in the Church, when considered as “Family of God”. That is what we are witnessing in these days: the fiftieth anniversary since the establishment of the Archdiocese of Kampala. And this calls mind the *Second Vatican Council* that had just been concluded, as well as the historic Visit of Pope Paul VI to Uganda, which took place a couple of years later. For all of these events we are eternally grateful to God.

A Golden Jubilee is a call for a new beginning, where each of you should be personally challenged by the question: *What kind of Church and society do I want today in Uganda, in the Archdiocese of Kampala*? Whatever might be the answer, that kind of Church depends on you; it depends on your witness to the Christian value of matrimony, living the sacrament in full fidelity and educating your children with a sense of responsibility; it depends on your active participation in family apostolate! Do you know that marriage is a true vocation, like the call to religious life or to priesthood? Yes, it really is! Christian marriage is a sacrament, a vocation. Choosing to get married means choosing a vocation. And as you probably know, a vocation implies a *mission*. God does not call us just for the sake of calling. He calls us so as to entrust us with some responsibility or mission to accomplish. If you are married, most likely you have been called by God to this vocation. But you need to ask yourselves very often whether you are really fulfilling the mission for which God has called you.

**2. God’s Plan for Marriage: a living icon of communion between God and His People.**

Before going further, I would like to remind you of the profound meaning of your vocation to marriage. God meant marriage to be an intimate community of love and life between husband and wife. From the creation narrative of *Genesis* we read that God saw it was not good for man to be alone (cf. Gen 2:18). Hence, He created a helper fit for him, a companion for lonely Adam. From that moment onwards, a man has to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, in order to become a new reality (cf. Gen 2:24).

The mutual love between husband and wife is, in turn, an image, or rather, a living icon of communion between God and His people; a meaningful expression of God’s love for us. This communion of love between God and His people found its definitive fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In the Letter to the Ephesians St. Paul wrote about the dynamic relationship of husband and wife as a sign that points to the mystery of Christ’s love for the Church.

If God has called you to the married life, it means He has entrusted you with this serious mission of being a living icon of the Trinitarian love in God, a living icon of the enduring and irrevocable love. You have been called and sent to love each other as God loves; as Christ loves his Church. The love married couples have for each other should be a mirror of God’s love for humanity. At this point, I wish to pose a question for your meditation: *How then does your marriage measure up to that vocation and mission? Is your marriage really worth of being called sign of divine love*? This question calls for a brief reflection on conjugal love.

**3. Conjugal love**

As I have already said, Christian marriage is *a communion of love* between husband and wife. This love, however, is not a given fact but a disposition that must be cultivated and nurtured. Husbands and wives need to constantly nurture their love for one another.

Pope Francis, in his latest document on marriage and family, has beautifully spoken of love between husband and wife. The Holy Father begins with a profound and practical reflection on the verses of Saint Paul’s famous Hymn to love (1 Cor 13). I am referring to the passage were St. Paul says that if one has no love, then he/she is nothing at all. “*If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophesy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing* (vv. 1-3).

Inspired by this hymn to charity, the Pope has tried to outline all the various dimensions and manifestations of love, in order to provide concrete advice for mutual love in the family. With St. Paul, the Pope clearly depicts what married love should look like: *love is not jealous, love is not boastful, love is patient and kind, love is not arrogant, love is generous, love does not immediately react harshly to the weaknesses and faults of others, love is not resentful, love forgives, love rejoices with others (instead of rejoicing in their sufferings and failures), love bears and endures all things*, etc. These enriching reflections on the daily demands of human love truly deserve being read so often by all married people as well as by those planning to marry. The Pope calls us to love authentically and to realize that this love is most often expressed in very simple ways, not only in great gestures. Being humble, saying please, asking for forgiveness, letting the other person speak – all are small things that express extraordinary love in ordinary ways. So, I invite you to get for yourselves a copy of the Pope’s Apostolic exhortation, titled *the Joy of love*, a document full of wisdom and “secrets” about “*the joy of marriage”*. The Pope himself encourages couples to read one paragraph together every day, discussing it and praying about it together. I, personally, would recommend above all, chapter 4 of that document.

**4. Help others in overcoming cultural and social hindrances to the Sacrament of Marriage**

Your wisdom and experience is needed to help all Catholics, especially those who wish to be married, to overcome cultural and social barriers to the Sacrament of Marriage. The whole People of God needs your help in dealing with whatever prevents people from entering into Catholic Marriage. One of them is *the cost of wedding ceremonies and the pressure from relatives and friends to make a big show*. In some cases, couples have been helped in this problem by the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony of several couples in the same liturgical ceremony. We hope such solutions, which involve the whole parish community, can continue to develop.

There are also other issues before the wedding day. I speak here of the various “traditions,” which are actually rather recent in origin, *especially the expensive exchanges of gifts and bargaining among the extended families* as well as the big parties that many people feel obliged to hold before the wedding. We need committed married couples to urge those who want to get married to resist such social pressures, and to have the courage to resist unneeded payments that can hold them in debt for decades and endanger the stability even of their Christian marriage.

The Church also needs your help to deal with *the difficult situation that Catholic couples, after living together in traditional marriage, encounter when they decide to enter into Holy Matrimony*. Often at the moment, the respective families start making additional demands of the couple and of one another that were not made before*.* They can inflict great financial burdens on those who want to regularize their marriages. This is sinful, and no appeal to “venerable traditions” will make it right. What counts is the teaching of our Lord and His Church.

From the earliest days of the Catholic faith in Uganda, we have the example of heroic Catholics who followed the teaching of Our Lord. We must not forget the example of the Uganda Martyrs, Matia Mulumba and Andrew Kaggwa, who were married in the Church and who took important decisions concerning their previous traditional marriages in order to be joined together in Christ. They had to resist very strong social pressures against remaining faithful to Christ and his teaching. They should be our examples.

**5. The Family: Object and Agent of Evangelization**

The evangelization of the family should be considered a major priority in the Church’s pastoral activity in order to enable it to assume in its turn the role of active subject in evangelization. The family should be a place where there is an ongoing formation of members in the faith. The home should be a formation centre where the members have an opportunity to receive some form of faith development and formation. In fact, the home is called the “domestic church” (*CCC, 1666*) – the place where parents should teach faith, love, justice, and concern for others to their children.

Concretely, Christian spirituality ought to find expression in the practice of common prayers, the common attendance at Sunday Mass and the common hearing and meditation of the word of God. The evangelization of the family is inconceivable without a renewed *listening to the word of God.* It seems that Catholic families still lack a more direct contact with the Bible, and that is why many of our catholic faithful have been led astray by some sects which have taken and continue taking advantage of such ignorance of the Bible. It is therefore important that the reading of Scriptures in the families be constantly encouraged. It would be a good practice, for instance, to have the so-called “family-Bible -time”, which means, setting aside a specific day and time for your family Bible study and sticking to it as best you can. Every family, of course, should have its Bible, kept in a worthy place and used for reading and prayer.

Before concluding, I would like to remind the parents of their serious role in faith-formation of their children. Upon them lies the gravest obligation of educating their children in faith. They have to teach the young children the knowledge and worship of God. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God. If the prayers, liturgies and narratives of Scripture are practiced and learned early in childhood, they become deeply engraved in the consciousness of children and remain with them for life. In all this, the good example of the parents is for the children of great importance.

May I conclude now by commending all of you to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of Saint Joseph her Spouse. May they keep and protect those holy and faithful Catholic marriages that are producing great fruit in the Church and society; may they strengthen and comfort those who may be struggling in their marriages; and, finally, may they enlighten and guide those couples preparing to enter the Sacrament of Matrimony in the days and months ahead.

God Bless you all!