

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
 APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 COUPLES FOR CHRIST CONFERENCE
 NATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTER, LEESBURG, VIRGINIA
 14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JULY 8, 2018**

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to this country, I want to express the spiritual closeness, paternal affection, and prayerful best wishes of the Holy Father, as you celebrate this conference whose theme is “Rekindle the Gift ... Fulfill your Ministry.” Your gathering is an enthusiastic response to the two Synods on the Family and the Holy Father’s Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which calls for a commitment to the renewal of the vocation to marriage and family life, accompaniment of families in their spiritual journey, and prophetic witness to the mercy and love of God in Christ Jesus that comes through family life.

Marriage is a great vocation, as you, the members of Couples for Christ, realize. Like all vocations, it is a gift whose purpose is to build up the Church and increase the kingdom of God in the world. Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, especially through their joy-filled witness as domestic churches. St. Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to “*stir into flame the gift of God*” is a call not only to renewal, but to remember – to remember when and how Christ first called you to your vocation; to think about the many difficulties along the way and how He accompanied you; to recall the many graces – “*grace upon grace*” – that He has poured out upon you over the years. It is an invitation to express gratitude to God for many blessings and to recognize the responsibility that comes with every gift received.

In baptism, you were anointed as priest, prophet, and king. In marriage, you were called to give prophetic witness to Christ’s unfailing love for His Bride, the Church – a love which was total, faithful, fruitful, and fully human. It is not always easy to live a prophetic vocation, especially in this day and age when many question the idea of marriage between man and woman, the permanence of marriage or the ability to find true and lasting love, or even whether marriage is necessary at all. Proposing the truth about marriage and sacramental marriage – whether in word or deed – is frequently met with resistance, especially by young people.

Nevertheless, God still calls you to be prophetic, just as He called Ezekiel in our first reading. God desires to show His people mercy and to call them to deeper love and conversion. He asks for our cooperation to go to the people, who, at times, are *hard of face, obstinate of heart*, and who are a “*rebellious house*”. God calls us to witness to the people *whether they heed or resist ... They shall know that a prophet has been in their midst*. We too know the fate of all the prophets: they suffered.

I think about Blessed Pope Paul VI, who fifty years ago issued his encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, in which he spoke beautifully about conjugal love, about God’s plan for life and love, of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the marital embrace, and of what would happen if men and women saw themselves as masters rather than stewards of human life. And for this, he suffered greatly, but still, guided by the Spirit, he exercised his prophetic charism. *Whether they heed or resist ... They shall know that a prophet has been in their midst*.

In accepting the prophetic call, we express our willingness to be missionary disciples. It is sometimes difficult to give a *joyful*, prophetic witness amid resistance or in the face of the suffering of our own families or families around us. At times, the task is daunting, and we feel powerless. It is there that the words spoken by the Lord to St. Paul can console us: “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*” This a joy for us – that God chooses to give us His grace, His friendship, to accompany us and perfect us – even in our weakness.

We see the power of God at work in weakness most clearly on the Cross. There Jesus is weak and humiliated. When he is seemingly powerless, He is saving the world! As married couples, you are called to witness to the love of the Crucified One for His Bride, and this is not easy. It is as the Holy Father says in *Gaudete et Exsultate*: “Whatever weariness and pain we may experience in living the commandment of love and following the way of justice, the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification.” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 19 March 2018, 92)

The experience of the cross in our lives is a gift and grace, which must also be stirred into flame, mindful that when we are feeling weak, it is then that He strengthens us to fulfill our task. Like Ezekiel, we should not judge our success, based on whether people heed or resist the call to deeper conversion to Christ and His love. Our success is measured by our obedience and fidelity to the God who first loved us. The outcome of our labors is the hands of God, not demanding or expecting more than God’s grace. The beautiful prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola called the *Suscipe* concludes with the line: “*Grant me only your grace and your love and with these I shall be satisfied and shall ask for nothing more.*”

This same Lord, who grants us his grace and love, calls us to fulfill our ministry – that is to share the gift we have received with our children, our neighbors, and our world. Of course, not everyone will appreciate or receive the gift we offer. Jesus knew this when he went to Nazareth and began to preach. *Nemo propheta in patria*. That is, no prophet is accepted in his native place. The people rejected Him, but He did not love them any less. While they were astonished by his preaching, his wisdom, and his miracles of healing, they could only see Him as the *carpenter, the son of Mary ... And they took offense at Him*. Sometimes familiarity at the human level makes it difficult to open ourselves to the divine dimension.

This can happen with us also, but what is being rejected is not us but the love that God offers. For our part, we cannot give up. We must be patient in working with others, trusting once more in the power of God’s love. Jesus’ miracles are more than signs of God’s power; they are signs of His love. This love is freely offered, but God does not force Himself upon anyone. Jesus did not perform many might deeds in his native place, because the people lacked faith and were not open to receiving Him for who He was – God made Flesh, God’s love with a Human Face.

It is this Face of Divine Mercy and Love that God calls you to show forth to families today – to mediate the Presence of God to them in order to reawaken in men and women a sense of their own humanity and their higher calling. Often, they will experience God’s love only through your patience and kindness. They may not always agree with you or receive your message, but that does not lessen your responsibility, as missionary disciples, to give prophetic witness: *Whether they heed or resist ... They shall know that a prophet has been in their midst.*

Go. Be prophetic. Rekindle the Gift. Fulfill your ministry.