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## THE POPE MEETS TEN THOUSAND ENGAGED COUPLES IN ST. PETER'S SQUARE

Vatican City, 14 February 2014 (VIS) – Ten thousand engaged couples from all over the world gathered today, on the feast of St. Valentine, in St. Peter's Square to consider the vocation of marriage, with the theme “The joy of 'Yes' for ever”, and to meet with Pope Francis. The event, organised by the Pontifical Council for the Family, takes as its starting point the idea that one does not get married once all problems are solved, but rather that one marries in order to face problems together, and concludes that it is still possible to take the risk of saying “for ever”, that it takes courage, but “for ever” is a prospect that brings joy and allows us to look to the future with hope.

The event began at 11 a.m. with a series of testimonies from couples, interspersed with readings and songs dedicated to love in its various manifestations, and at 12.30 p.m. the Holy Father entered the Square to greet the couples and to comment on three issues put forward by many couples: The fear of “for ever”, living together, the matrimonial way of life; and the type of matrimonial celebration.

“It is important to ask ourselves if it is possible to love one another 'for ever'”, affirmed the Pope. “Today many people are afraid of making definitive decisions, that affect them for all their lives, because it seems impossible ... and this mentality leads many who are preparing for marriage to say, 'We will stay together for as long as our love lasts'. But what do we mean by 'love'? A mere emotion, a psycho-physical state? Certainly, if it is just this, it cannot provide the foundation for building something solid. But if instead love is a relationship, then it is a growing reality, and we can also say, by way of example, that it is built in the same way that we build a house. And we build a house together, not alone! ... You would not wish to build it on the shifting sands of emotions, but on the rock of true love, the love that comes from God. The family is born of this project of love that wishes to grow, as one builds a house that becomes the locus of affection, help, hope and support. Just as God's love is stable and lasts for ever, we want the love on which a family is based to be stable and to last for ever. We must not allow

ourselves to be conquered by a 'throwaway culture'. This fear of 'for ever' is cured by entrusting oneself day by day to the Lord Jesus in a life that becomes a daily spiritual path of common growth, step by step. Because 'for ever' is not simply a question of duration! A marriage does not succeed just because it lasts; its quality is also important. To stay together and to know how to love each other for ever is the challenge Christian married couples face! ... In the Our Father prayer we say, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. Married couples may also learn to pray, 'Give us this day our daily love', teach us to love each other, to care for each other. The more you entrust yourselves to the Lord, the more your love will be 'for ever', able to renew itself and to overcome every difficulty”.

In response to the second question, Francis emphasised that living together is “an art, a patient, beautiful and fascinating journey ... which can be summarised in three words: please, thank you and sorry. 'Please' is a kind request to be able to enter into the life of someone else with respect and care. ... True love does not impose itself with hardness and aggression. ... St. Francis said that 'courtesy is the sister of charity, it extinguishes hatred and kindles love'. And today, in our families, in our world, often violent and arrogant, there is a need for far more courtesy. 'Thank you': gratitude is an important sentiment. Do we know how to say thank you? In your relationship, and in your future as married couples, it is important to keep alive your awareness that the other person is a gift from God, and we should always give thanks for gifts from God. ... It is not merely a kind word to use with strangers, in order to be polite. It is necessary to know how to say thank you, to journey ahead together”.

“Sorry'. In our lives we make many errors, many mistakes. We all do. ... And this is why we need to be able to use this simple word, 'sorry'. In general we are all ready to accuse others and to justify ourselves. It is an instinct that lies at the origins of many disasters. Let us learn to recognise our mistakes and to apologise. ... Also in this way, the Christian family grows. We are all aware that the perfect family does not exist, nor does the perfect husband, nor the perfect wife. We exist, and we are sinners. Jesus, who knows us well, teaches us a secret: never let a day go by without asking forgiveness, or without restoring peace to your home. ... If we learn to apologise and to forgive each other, the marriage will last and will move on”.

Finally, the Holy Father commented that marriage should be a celebration, but a Christian rather than a worldly one. He offered as an example Jesus' first miracle at Cana, when he transformed water into wine when the latter appeared to have

run out, thus saving the celebrations. “What happened at Cana two thousand years ago, happens in reality at every wedding feast. It is the presence of the Lord, who reveals Himself and the gift of His grace, that will render your marriage full and profoundly true. ... At the same time, it is good for your wedding to be sober and to emphasise that which is truly important. Some people are more concerned with external signs, with the banquet, the dress... These are important aspects of a feast, but only if they are able to indicate the true reason for your joy: the Lord's blessing upon your love. Ensure that, like the wine in Cana, the external signs of your wedding feast reveal the presence of the Lord and remind you, and all those present, of the origin of and reason for your joy”.