

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, 7th July 2011, we begin the celebrations in honour of Bl. Peter To Rot, as we open the Jubilee Year to remember the 100 years of his birth.

Peter To Rot is the first native Papua New Guinean to be raised to the rank of Blessed in the Catholic Church and the Archdiocese of Rabaul feels very privileged because he belongs to this particular church.

We all know that Bl. Peter To Rot underwent martyrdom in order to defend the sanctity of married life and the sacrament of marriage. This is the reason why we decided to choose as the general theme for these celebrations the words of Jesus: “Love one another just as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). It is very clear that to survive married life must be based on love, on genuine and true love.

The main objective of these celebrations, that will last 18 months (7th July 2011 – 30th December 2012), is the “renewal of Family Life”. We will do this by deepening the Gospels values as the foundation of Family Life and by coming to know and appreciate more the sacrament of marriage.

To start off, we, your Bishop, wish to write about the vocation to “Family Life” and, in particular, to “Married Life”, a vocation that involves everybody: parents and children, as well as social institutions and the Church. Blessed John Paul II has stated: “*The future of humanity passes by the way of the family*” (FC, n. 86). He also said: “*The nation goes the way the family goes*”. We can safely say, therefore, that the future of Papua New Guinea depends on the “Family Life” of its people.

Often we hear people asking: What’s happening to our families? What is marriage? What is the Sacrament of Marriage? Is there any difference between the so-called “traditional marriage” and the “church marriage”? How can we prepare young people for marriage? What is the responsibility of parents towards their children? What can the Church do to help our families to be truly Christian families?

We, your Bishops, wish to offer some points of reflection on some issues that affect the family and family life, because we feel that what is called for today, as far as the family and marriage are concerned, is a spiritual renewal at the level of the individual Catholic, at the level of the family, the parish, and the diocese.

1. The Plan of God for Marriage and the Family

God created man in his own image and likeness. By calling man to existence *through love*, God also called him *for love*. God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. We can, therefore, conclude that love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. “True love” is the foundation of a successful married life. Unless people get married out of true love, we will continue to have shaky relationships and weak family life. Unfortunately, very frequently parenthood comes before marriage and cohabitation before matrimony. We have too many young couples who live together without the benefit of the grace of the sacrament. This is not the right way to start a new family. St. Paul correctly stated: “If God is with us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). But what happens if God is not with us and the grace of the sacrament is not with us? Can this be one of the reasons why there are many broken families? “**We all need to do more about marriage preparation**”, especially in regards to the sacrament of marriage. Blessed Peter ToRot suffered martyrdom because he defended the sanctity of marriage and the sacrament of marriage. He taught without fear that a man should have only one wife and a woman should have only one husband. If he could speak to us today, what would Blessed Peter ToRot tell us? I believe that he would tell us, especially young people that it is wrong to live together without the celebration of the sacrament. He would tell us that living together is not the right way to prepare for marriage. “Trial marriage” is not marriage!

2. The preparation to marriage

If the above words are to be taken seriously, it is clear that marriage must be properly prepared also because the Church and society in PNG depend heavily on the quality of family life. If the

family disintegrates also the nation disintegrates and we are already seeing signs of this disintegration.

Consequently:

- a. **It is necessary to help young people to prepare for marriage and family life**, in particular it is necessary to help them to understand the “**true meaning of love**”. The word “love” can mean so many things. Benedict XVI in his Encyclical Letter – *Deus Caritas est* – says that there is “the love of attraction”. A boy feels attracted to a girl; a girl feels attracted to a boy. This is not bad, because love must start somewhere. But the “love of attraction” is just the start; it should not stop there. Unfortunately, today, this is what happens with so many of our young people. Because they feel attracted to each other they think (or believe) that they are in love. This is the reason why we have so many unwed mothers or single parents. Love must go deeper; it must become “love of friendship”; where the man and the woman learn to talk to each other and confide to each other, without keeping secrets from each other. They do so, because they TRUST each other. Trust is a very important element of love. But also the “love of friendship” is not enough. True and real love exists when love becomes selfless, totally given. Jesus gave us the example of total love. He laid down his life for us. True love exists when a man is ready to lay down his life for his wife, and the wife is ready to lay down her life for her husband and when parents are ready to sacrifice themselves for their children and children for their parents.

“No greater love a man has for his friends than to lay down his life for them” (Jn 15:13). How beautiful the world and family life would be, if every husband were ready to lay down his life for his wife and the wife for her husband; if parents were ready to lay down their life for their children, and the children for their parents!

- b. **It is necessary to help young people to understand the right use of sexuality and not to lose the sound traditions and customs.** At the beginning of these Centenary celebrations in honour of Blessed Peter To Rot, we, your bishops, wish to address directly all the youth of the Archdiocese:

“Dear young people, we ask you to look at chastity as something beautiful, as something that will help you to value sexuality. Chastity is not something negative, or a deprivation, but a gift, a call from the Lord to love Him and your partner, totally, exclusively and radically. It is a virtue that develops a person’s authentic maturity and makes you capable of respecting and fostering the ‘*nuptial meaning*’ of the body. It consists in self-control, in the capacity of guiding the sexual instinct to the service of love and of integrating it in the development of the person. When you engage in pre-marital sex, you are seeking yourselves rather than the good of the other person. Let no one deceive you into thinking that you cannot control yourselves. By calling for ‘chastity before marriage (and faithfulness in marriage)’, the Church is challenging you to take the less traveled road; a road, to some extent, contrary to cultural practices and habits. But it is the only road you must take if you want to have better families in the future and prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. This is a call to all young people, but we wish to single out the young teachers and nurses, because of the crucial role they play in our communities, schools, and health centres, to become role models and to take the lead in achieving changes in the lifestyle of the people.

3. **Marriage, a call to holiness!**

Every baptized person is called to become holy, regardless of his/her vocation in life. This is true for priests, for religious women and men, and it is true for those called to married life. When a man and a woman commit themselves, in the sacrament of marriage, to love one another in the same way that Jesus loved his Church, they both advance towards their own perfection, as well as their mutual sanctification.

To achieve the sanctity of family life prayer is needed. Psalm 127 says: *“If the Lord does not build the house, the work of the builders is useless”*. We cannot build the family apart from God. **A Godless family is a loveless family**. It is necessary that we place God at the center of our family life. To this end, Pope Benedict XVI urges every household to *“have its Bible, to be kept in a worthy place and used for reading and prayer”* (Verbum Domini, 85). We would also like to make our own the words that Pope Paul VI addressed to parents during a General Audience (11 August 1976): *“Mothers, do you teach your children the Christian prayers? Do you prepare them for the sacraments that they receive when they are young: Confession, Communion and Confirmation? Do you encourage them when they are sick to think of Christ suffering, to invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin and the saints? Do you say the family Rosary together? And you, fathers, do you pray with your children at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in thought and action, joined to some common prayer, is a lesson for life, an act of worship of singular value”*.

As we begin the year of Blessed Peter ToRot, we invoke the intercession of the Family of Nazareth upon all the families of Papua New Guinea and, especially, of the Archdiocese of Rabaul: upon grandparents, parents, children, brothers and sisters, the young and the elderly, the sick and the lonely, and those who are far from home.

*Lord Jesus, you have called each of us by name
to live in communion of love and holiness
and to be one in the great family of God's children.
Send us forth to shine with your light and to communicate
the fire of the Spirit through a life inspired by the gospel.*

*Virgin Most Holy, You were the "handmaid of the Lord";
fill all the members of our families
with gratitude and enthusiasm for this vocation and mission.
Give them your unreserved willingness for service to God
and the love for each other.*

*St. Joseph, you were the humble servant of Jesus and Mary,
may your spiritual strength and trust in God
inspire our men, fathers of families and leaders of society,
so that they might know how to overcome all the obstacles
that they encounter in accomplishing their mission.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
implore God's blessings on all our families,
so that they might more fully respond to their vocation and mission,
in establishing on earth the civilization of truth and love,
as God wills it, for his glory. Amen.*