

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, 7<sup>th</sup> 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 (7<sup>th</sup> July 2011 – 30<sup>th</sup> 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.

During these 18 months we should refer back to the Diocesan Pastoral Plan whose vision about the family is for "*parents and children to reflect the image of the Blessed Trinity so that the family would grow into a domestic Church, where its loving relationships would bear witness to the Christian meaning and values of Christian family life*".

To fulfill the mission and achieve the goals of the Diocesan Pastoral Plans a monthly topic will be proposed for our reflection, meditation and action. We hope that at the closing of the Year of Blessed Peter To Rot, on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2012, our families may resemble a little more the Holy Family of Nazareth, whose feast we will celebrate that day.

To start off, we, your Bishops, 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.

Traditionally, the family (and the clan) with its own culture and traditions provided firm roots for all its members. It provided norms of conduct as far as relationship between a man and a woman. It ensured a positive relationship of solidarity and mutual respect between adults and young people. The nuclear and extended family assured that the children grew up and lived in harmony with their family, clan and environment.

The advent of the mass media, technology and progress, the growing phenomenon of urbanization, accompanied by the lack of opportunities for employment, have brought about rapid cultural changes and the breakdown of traditional values that have adversely affected family life and especially Marriage.

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?

According to the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, "*the person principally responsible in the diocese for the pastoral care of the family is the Bishop. As father and pastor, he must exercise particular solicitude in this clearly priority sector of pastoral care. He must devote to it personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources, but above all personal support for the families and for all those who, in the various diocesan structures, assist him in the pastoral care of the family*" (FC, n.73).

Aware of this responsibility of ours, we 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. Love includes the human body and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love. "Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. Sexuality is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present. If the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally... The only "place" in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself, which only in this light manifests its true meaning" (FC 11).

### **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. "*This implies great responsibility for Christians who enter the marriage covenant, and there needs to be suitable pastoral preparation for all couples seeking the Sacrament of Marriage*" (E in O 45). "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. This is what the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have stated in their Pastoral Letter in 2009. Our parish priests should take the lead on this.

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” is the most used and abused word. We hear it sung in so many “love songs”, we read it in any sort of publications, and, in urban areas, we see it portrayed in movies. Unfortunately, more often than not what we hear or read or see is not love but the opposite of it: it is selfishness, greed, even lust. Real love, instead, demands that we seek the good of the other person rather than ourselves. St. Paul gave us a deep description of love: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”* (1Cor. 13). And Jesus gave us the best definition of love when he said: *“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*".

### 4. **Services in the Diocese**

The realities of the family and of family life, the importance of a thorough preparation to marriage, the upbringing and education of children, and other issues involving the family, require the efforts, cooperation and participation of everybody: the family itself, the school, the Church, and civic authorities.

The Archdiocese of Rabaul has the following services:

- The "*Family Life Apostolate*" Board, whose chairperson is Mr. Joseph Nuabi and whose coordinator is Mrs. Rosemary Valute, assisted by some couples. One of the "Goals' Statements" of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan is that all "parishes have established family core groups". These groups, within the parishes, in coordination with the parish priest, should organize activities for the growth of families, reach out to

families that are encountering problems and help those that live in “irregular situations”.

- *The Marriage Tribunal*, headed by Fr. Francis Meli, is tasked to investigate whether or not there are grounds to declare a marriage null and void from its beginning. In this regard, we would like to ask the parish priests to take a more direct interest in directing couples, who are seeking a “declaration of nullity” of their marriage, to the diocesan Tribunal, to help them in collecting evidences and in interviewing witnesses. In addition, priests should themselves help couples whose cases do not pose any canonical impediment.

#### CONCLUSION,

It has been said that the dysfunctional family is the family that has problems. We have always believed, and we are ever more convinced, that that statement is not true. Every family encounters some problem of any kind. Problems in themselves do not make a family dysfunctional. **The dysfunctional family is the family whose members do not talk about their problems.** We urge, therefore, parents, children, brothers and sisters to have the courage and find the time to sit down and talk about their problems. When communication and dialogue stop in a family, love begins to decrease and it could totally disappear.

We wish to encourage those families that are blessed with peace and harmony to continue in their journey with God’s help and grace and to share their blessings with others.

We also encourage those couples and families that are faced with some problems to seek help, knowing that in the parishes and in the Archdiocese you could find people ready to help.

Unfortunately, in our Catholic communities there are those who sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned. There are also those who, through their own fault, have destroyed a canonically valid marriage. There are also those who have entered into a second union. What should we do? How should we deal with them?

Yes, it is true that those who have been previously bound by sacramental marriage and who have attempted a second marriage cannot be admitted to Eucharistic Communion because their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Nevertheless, “*the Church cannot abandon them*” (FC, n.84).

Blessed John Paul II wrote: “I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced, and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life. They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favour of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God’s grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope.” (FC, n.84).

We invoke the intercession of the Family of Nazareth and of Blessed Peter To Rot upon all the families of the Archdiocese of Rabaul: 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.*

+ Karl Hesse, MSC  
Archbishop of Rabaul

+ Francesco Panfilo, SDB  
Coadjutor Archbishop

+ John Doaninoel, SM  
Auxiliary Bishop